NATION

Calling someone Pakistani in poor taste, not a crime: SC

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BUSINESS

Tariff war fears push Sensex below 73K

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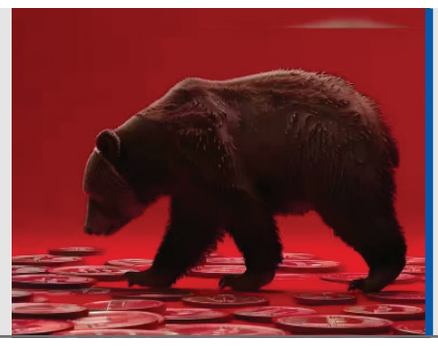

SPORTS

Praggnanandhaa faces Shankland after rest day

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈہ روزنامہ بنگلور

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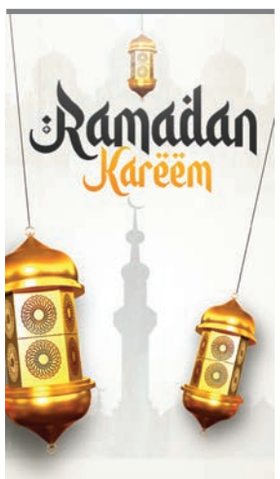

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NCP's Munde quits after aide named murder mastermind

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

Maharashtra minister Dhananjay Munde on Tuesday resigned from the state cabinet, days after his close aide Walmik Karad was named as the mastermind in the Beed sarpanch murder case. "Dhananjay Munde has submitted his resignation. I have accepted it and forwarded it to Governor CP Radhakrishnan," Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis told reporters at Vidhan Bhawan. The resignation followed a vociferous demand by the opposition for Munde's removal from the cabinet. Fadnavis held a late-night meeting with Deputy CM and NCP chief Ajit Pawar on Monday, along with senior NCP leaders, including Munde, to discuss the issue. *—PTI*

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Judges' shortage affects POCSO case hearing: SC

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court expressed concern on Tuesday over the insufficient number of judges in trial courts to implement its 2019 directives aimed at combating child sexual offences. A bench, led by Justices Bela M Trivedi and Prasanna B Varale, addressed a suo motu case regarding the rising incidents of child rape. Justice Trivedi noted that vacancies in district courts hinder the establishment of specially designated courts for POCSO cases. While other directives from the 2019 ruling had seen some compliance, the court acknowledged persistent issues related to delays in forensic lab reports. Over 24,000 FIRs related to child sexual offences were recorded in the first half of 2019, with a significant number still pending investigation. *—PTI*

Trump pauses aid to Ukraine after spat with Zelenskyy

Soon after, Zelenskyy calls the spat with Trump 'regrettable'

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

President Donald Trump has ordered a "pause" on US aid to Ukraine following a turbulent meeting in the Oval Office, as he pressures Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to engage in peace talks with Russia.

A White House official confirmed the decision, stating that Trump is focused on reaching a peace agreement to end the three-year war sparked by Russia's invasion. The US will "pause and review" its aid to ensure it is contributing to a solution.

Hours after the White House announced a pause on military aid to Ukraine, Zelenskyy said the Oval Office blowup with Trump was "regrettable," and that, "it is time to make things right."

He said Ukraine is ready to sign a deal on its rare-earth minerals that was sought by the Trump administration.

A White House official confirmed the decision, stating that Trump is focused on reaching a peace agreement to end the war **PHOTO: PTI**

Ukrainians expressed alarm and apprehension over the issue.

Officials in Kyiv said they were grateful for vital US help in the war and want to keep working with Washington. The country's prime minister, though, said Ukraine still wants security guarantees to be part of any peace deal and won't recognize Russian occupation of any Ukrainian land.

Ukraine and its allies are concerned Trump is pushing for a quick ceasefire that will favour Russia, which Kyiv says cannot be trusted to honour truces.

This development recalls a similar episode in 2019, when Trump withheld congressionally approved aid to Ukraine, seeking to pressure Zelenskyy into launching investigations into Joe Biden. This incident led to Trump's first impeachment.

In the run-up to his 2024 election, Trump has vowed to swiftly end the war in Ukraine. His frustration with Zelenskyy has grown, especially after the Ukrainian leader suggested that a resolution to the conflict is still "very far away." Trump has criticised Zelenskyy's remarks, claiming they show a reluctance to pursue peace and accusing him of relying on US backing. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5 & 6

HC give 4 weeks' relief to Buch in stock mkt fraud case

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

The Bombay High Court granted a four-week stay on a special court's order to file a First Information Report (FIR) against former Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch and five other officials, citing that the order was issued without sufficient detail.

Justice Shivkumar Dige stated that the 1 March order failed to specify the roles of the accused in the alleged stock market fraud and regulatory violations, which were related to incidents dating back to 1994. Justice Dige remarked that the special court's decision appeared "mechanical" and lacked a proper examination of the allegations.

The stay came in response to petitions filed by Buch and several current and former Sebi officials, challenging the special court's directive for the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) to register an FIR following complaints from Sapan Shrivastava, a media reporter. They claimed the order was arbitrary and based on a vague complaint that did not establish a prima facie case against them. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Sebi officials, argued that the allegations were frivolous and contended that Shrivastava, the complainant, was an extortionist masquerading as a public-spirited individual. Senior counsel Amit Desai echoed these sentiments, asserting that pursuing allegations of this nature against senior officials would be an "attack on the economy." *—PTI*

HC grants bail to Christian in AgustaWestland ED case

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday granted bail to alleged middleman Christian Michel James in the Rs 3,600-crore AgustaWestland money laundering case. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma granted the reprieve to James after the order on his bail plea was reserved on 28 February. More details are awaited.

The Supreme Court previously granted bail to the British national in a related CBI case on 18 February.

The ED's counsel opposed Michel's plea, saying the British national did not meet the 'twin tests' for grant of bail under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and was a flight risk.

Michel's lawyer sought the relief on grounds that he had already spent over six years in jail while the anti-money laundering law has a maximum punishment of seven years. James was extradited from Dubai in December 2018 and was subsequently arrested by the CBI and the ED.

Christian Michel **PHOTO: PTI**

He is among the three alleged middlemen being probed in the case and the other two are Guido Haschke and Carlo Gerosa.

The CBI, in its chargesheet, claimed an estimated loss of 398.21 million euros (about Rs 2,666 crore) to the exchequer due to the deal that was signed on 8 February, 2010, for the supply of VVIP choppers worth 556.262 million euros and alleged James had received 30 million euros (about Rs 225 crore) from AgustaWestland. *—PTI*

India fumes as UNHR Chief flags Manipur issue

GENEVA, 3 MAR 2025

India slammed the 'unfounded and baseless comments made by the UN's human rights chief, who mentioned Kashmir and Manipur in his global update, with Delhi voicing concern over the update's generalised remarks and 'cherry picking' of situations.

"As India was mentioned by name, let me begin by emphasising that the world's largest democracy continues to be a healthy, vibrant and pluralistic society. Unfounded and baseless comments in the update contrast jarringly with ground realities," Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva Ambassador Arindam Bagchi countered on Monday.

Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations Arindam Bagchi **PHOTO: PTI**

India's strong retort came after UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk, in his global update to the 58th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, called for 'stepped-up' efforts to address violence and displacement in Manipur based on dialogue and peacebuilding.

Calling for nurturing of participation and inclusion from all levels of society, Turk expressed concern over the use of restrictive laws and harassment against human rights defenders and independent journalists resulting in arbitrary detention and a diminished civic space, including in Kashmir.

Bagchi however countered that the people of India had repeatedly proven wrong such misplaced concerns urged a better understanding of India its civilizational ethos of diversity and openness.

Calling out the passing reference to Jammu and Kashmir as 'Kashmir' Bagchi said over simplification of complex issues was concerning especially in a year which saw large voter turnout in elections and booming tourism in the region. *—PTI*

Kohli's master-class helps India 'bury' Australia to enter CT final

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

Virat Kohli did not finish the chase for once but his measured 84-run knock steered India into their fifth Champions Trophy final with a clinical four-wicket win over an understrength and profligate Australia in the first last-four clash here on Tuesday.

The Indian triumph ensures that the final of the eight-team competition will now be held here instead of Lahore, the original host of the marquee clash.

Player of the match Kohli (84, 98 balls, 5x4) was the fulcrum of Indian batting as they scaled down 265 in 48.1 overs after Steve Smith (73) and Alex Carey (61) led the Aussies to 264.

Now, India will await the winner of the second semi-final between South Africa and New Zealand at Lahore on Wednesday.

Virat Kohli celebrates his half century during the CT semi-final cricket match **PHOTO: PTI**

Kohli had support from Shreyas Iyer (45) with whom he realised 91 runs for the third wicket, and steadied the ship after the early departures of skipper Rohit Sharma (28) and Shubman Gill (9).

Australia were weakened by the absence of some of their premier stars, but India had not beaten them in the knockouts of an ICC tournament since the quarterfinal of the 2011 World Cup. Kohli lost the company of both Iyer, who played some delectable shots, and Axar Patel (27) in rather quick succession but Kohli went past his 50 in 53 balls. Glenn Maxwell dropped him on 51 off left-arm spinner Cooper Connolly, a perceived early signal of an inevitable Kohli hundred. *—PTI*

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K'taka govt tables Bill on Palace Grounds

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

State government on Tuesday introduced the 2024-25 in the Assembly to assert its rights over the expansive Palace Grounds, which span 472 acres and 16 guntas near Mehkri Circle. The State Cabinet had decided on 24 January to reject the issuance of Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to the Mysuru royal family for acquiring nearly 16 acres of land within the Palace Grounds. Accordingly, the government issued an ordinance to this effect on 29 January. According to the government, granting TDR for the Palace Grounds would not be in the best interests. The Cabinet had flagged concerns over spending Rs 3,014 crore to acquire 16 acres of land for just 2 km of road. Three Bills—the Karnataka Pawn Brokers (Amendment) Bill, the Karnataka Prohibition of Charging Exorbitant Interest Bill, and Karnataka Money Lenders Bill—were also table. *—PTI*

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Punjab police detains SKM leaders ahead of protest

Harinder Lakhowal **PHOTO: PTI**

LUDHIANA/ HOSHIARPUR, 4 MARCH

Ahead of their planned protest in Chandigarh on 5 March, several Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) leaders were detained in early morning raids at their residences on Tuesday and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann denounced the protesting farmer unions, saying they have turned Punjab into a "state of dharnas" and caused huge losses to it.

Speaking to reporters in the Kharar tehsil office in Mohali, Mann said he had categorically told the farmer bodies that they should not remain under the impression that he could not take action.

Farmer leaders and opposition parties criticised the AAP government for the crackdown, which came a day after talks between Chief Minister Mann and SKM leaders ended abruptly with the CM walking out of their meeting.

"There is a fight to take credit among various farmers' unions which are trying to create anarchy by running a parallel government," said Mann."The government cannot stifle the voice of farmers with such steps," Bharti Kisan Union (Lakhowal) general secretary Harinder Singh Lakhowal. *—PTI*

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'STAY HYDRATED'

Bengaluru should brace for 40°C this summer, warns IMD

BENGALURU 4 MARCH

The Silicon Valley of India, once known as the "no ceiling fan city", can no longer boast of its pleasant weather, with daytime peak temperatures reaching 40°C this summer.

While the summer is yet to arrive in Bengaluru, the city has already recorded 34°C on 3 March, which was forecasted to touch 35°C on 4 March. This means that a consistent rise in temperature is expected in the summer months of April–May reveals the data of the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

It will not be surprising if Bengaluru finds its place among the hottest cities in India this summer, as it is likely to hit a record 40°C during April–May, said CS Patil, a senior scientist with IMD, Bengaluru.

"Bengaluru will witness a hotter summer compared to last year when the maximum temperature hit 39.4°C. This is set to rise by 0.6°C this year, which means it will touch the 40°C mark. This is usually the weather in the northern interior part of Karnataka," he said.

Warning that 2pm will be the hottest time of the day in the city, Patil urged people to follow precautionary measures to avoid sunstroke. He said people should avoid stepping out between 11am and 3pm. They should consume enough liquids and nutritious food but avoid carbonated drinks, he said. *—Salar News*

NORTH TO WITNESS 43°C TO 45°C

The IMD data also revealed that the northern interior parts of the state, which include districts such as Kalburgai, Yadgir, Bagalkot, Raichur and Vijayapura, are very likely to experience a maximum temperture of 45°C during April–May. Though pre-monsoon showers are expected to arrive towards the end of March, starting in April, they will occur in isolated parts of Karnataka, bringing some relief to several parts of the state, including Bengaluru.

PHOTO: X

Woman found dead at home, 2 detained

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

A 45-year-old woman, who used to run a paying guest (PG) accommodation in Konanakunte, was found dead under mysterious circumstances on Tuesday. Police have detained two persons for questioning. The deceased, identified as Hemavathi, was found hanging inside her house on the morning of 3 March. While initial reports suggested death by suicide, police have launched a detailed investigation after noticing minor injury marks on her body, apart from the ligature mark on her neck. Family members alleged that Hemavathi was murdered. Based on preliminary inquiries, police have taken two men – identified as Girish and Saravana – into custody for questioning. Hemavathi lost her husband a few weeks ago. However, it is alleged that she owed money to Saravana, whom she had known for several years. (Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.)

—Salar News

Youth flees to Maha Kumbh after theft, arrested

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

City police have arrested a 23-year-old man who had fled to the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj after allegedly robbing three shops on Cholaru Palya Main Road last month. The accused, identified as Udaya, along with his accomplices, broke open the shutters of three shops around 4am on 6 February, using a gas cutter. They stole Rs 1 lakh from a medical store and Rs 4,000 from a nearby milk parlour.

KP Agrahara Inspector Raviprakash said Udaya fled the city soon after the robbery, hoping to evade arrest by hiding in the crowd at Maha Kumbh. However, police traced him to Prayagraj and arrested him, he said. *—Salar News*

2 held for duping job seekers with fake RAW offers

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

The City Crime Branch (CCB) sleuths have arrested two people, including a photocopy shop owner, for allegedly cheating job seekers by promising placements in the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), a national intelligence agency. The arrests follow a complaint filed by a resident of Yelachenahalli in JP Nagar, alleging that the prime accused, Venugopal K, posed as a senior officer worked at RAW's Bengaluru office and collected lakhs of rupees from 30 candidates in the last two years promising senior posts in RAW. CCB tracked down and interrogated the accused when he revealed that co-accused Arvind Naidu a photocopy and stationery shop owner had helped him prepare fake documents. Police have arrested Naidu and recovered ID card printer, 86 fake RAW letterheads, bogus ID cards, service books, fake appointment orders, and RAW official seals from him.

—Salar News

BJP flays Cong for mishandling KPSC exams

Ashoka claims 59 questions in Kannada did not correspond correctly to their English translations

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

The BJP has accused the Congress government of "mishandling" the civil services examination conducted by the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC), calling for the commission's closure and a complete overhaul akin to the Union Public Service Commission.

During an Assembly session, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka highlighted issues surrounding the KPSC's conduct, specifically regarding the recruitment for 384 Karnataka Administrative Service (KAS) posts. The examination has been postponed four times, with the preliminary exam finally held on 27 August, 2024. Ashoka claimed that 59 questions in Kannada did not correspond correctly to their English translations, causing significant uproar.

He asserted that the translation process was flawed, with officials preparing the English version first and then translating, resulting in poor-quality questions: "It's not our Kannada but 'Google Kannada'," he pointed out. Ashoka noted that various literary figures and religious leaders had called for the exam to be conducted again.

Although Chief Minister Siddaramaiah acknowledged responsibility and assured rigorous measures would be taken in future exams, Ashoka claimed that comments from KPSC officials trivialised the issues faced by Kannada-speaking students.

> Illegal liquor sales is a serious issue. Every legislator would have received some information about where such activities are happening in their constituencies. Take a list from them and ask the officials concerned to stop it —UT Khader, Speaker

The BJP leader criticised the expenditure of Rs 15 crore for the examination and subsequent cancellation, leading to further financial wastage for a re-examination. Ashoka condemned the KPSC for misdirecting question papers between districts, prompting public outrage and exam boycotts.

In response, State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil pledged reforms. Minister Priyank Kharge explained that reliance on technology contributed to translation mishaps. *—PTI*

Speaker urges action against illegal liquor sales

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Amidst serious concerns expressed by MLAs across party lines over illegal sale of liquor, Karnataka Legislative Assembly Speaker UT Khader on Tuesday directed Excise Minister R B Thimmapur to instruct jurisdictional officials in every Assembly segment to stop the illegal sale of liquor in rural areas and take action if they fail to do so.

"This is a serious issue. Every legislator would have received some information about where such activities are happening in their constituencies. Take a list from them and ask the officials concerned to stop it. If they fail to do so take action against them, whoever they are," Khader told the Minister in the Legislative Assembly during the Question Hour.

Earlier, MLAs especially those from the opposition, were not satisfied with Minister Thimmapur's reply to Congress MLA Koujalagi Mahantesh Shivanand's question regarding the illegal sale of liquor in rural areas. The Minister asserted that the government was making efforts to control illegal sales of liquor and campaigns were being carried out. *—PTI*

K'taka considering legislators salary revision: Minister

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

The Karnataka government is contemplating legislation to revise the salaries of its legislators, according to State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil.

During a recent meeting of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of the Legislative Assembly, the issue was discussed. Patil informed reporters that the government will consider the suggestions made during the meeting, with the possibility of introducing legislation in the current session. However, when queried about the potential for a 50 per cent salary increase, he stated that no decision had been reached yet since the last adjustment was made a considerable time ago. Patil addressed a proposal for a budget of Rs 20 crore towards a constitution club for legislators, noting that there are currently inadequate facilities. The Speaker of the Assembly brought this matter to the Chief Minister. State Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy acknowledged requests from some MLAs for a salary hike due to high travel expenses within constituencies. *—PTI*

'Insurance rules not above succession laws'

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

In a landmark judgment, the Karnataka High Court has determined that insurance policy nominees do not possess absolute rights over benefits in the face of claims from the policyholder's legal heirs. The court stated that Section 39 of the Insurance Act, 1938, which deals with nominations, does not supersede personal succession laws, such as the Hindu Succession Act, 1956.

The ruling arose from the case of Neelavva @ Neelamma vs Chandravva @ Chandrakala @ Hema and Others, centering on a dispute over entitlement to insurance payouts. Justice Anant Ramanath Hegde ruled that a nominee may receive benefits only if legal heirs do not assert their claims. Should a legal heir invoke their rights, the nominee's claim must defer to succession laws. This case involved a man who named his mother as the sole nominee for two insurance policies prior to his marriage and the birth of his child, without updating the nomination after his marriage. Following his death in 2019, a legal dispute erupted between his mother and wife regarding the insurance payout. The trial court ruled for an equal division of benefits among the mother, wife, and child, a decision the High Court upheld. The court cited the Supreme Court's ruling in Shakti Yezdani vs Jayanand Jayant Salgaonkaa, reinforcing that nominations cannot override succession laws. *—PTI*

Did CM follow due procedure for renovation of his residence: BJP

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

The BJP has demanded that the Congress party clarify whether it obtained the necessary financial approvals for the renovation of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's official residence. Media reports indicate that the renovation, described as "reconstruction and beautification," is being conducted without the finance committee's approval, as stated by BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi.

Trivedi urged the Congress to confirm if proper procedures were followed and to provide evidence if they were. "If due procedures were not adhered to, questions arise about whether the Congress in Karnataka is attempting to bypass established rules and laws, similar to its former ally in Delhi, in an effort to replicate the controversial 'Sheesh Mahal' renovation," he remarked, alluding to substantial renovations undertaken at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence.

While acknowledging that the Congress government has the right to renovate the chief minister's residence, Trivedi insisted on transparency regarding the legal processes involved. He warned that failing to do so could suggest another instance of corruption.

Additionally, he highlighted concerns surrounding corruption allegations made by the Karnataka State Contractors' Association, describing the situation as "deeply concerning and disgraceful." Trivedi claimed that the association's revelations indicated a level of corruption exceeding that of the previous BJP administration. He accused the Congress government of neglecting its promises and misappropriating funds intended for Dalit welfare schemes, further entrenching corruption within the state. *—PTI*

SEEKING RECOGNITION

Members of Akshara Dasoha with CITU demand a salary increase during a protest at Freedom Park, Bengaluru **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Members of the Labour Rights Forum demand full time jobs during a protest at Freedom Park, Bengaluru **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Former legislator Kazi Arshad Ali dead

BIDAR, 4 MARCH

Kazi Arshad Ali, a former member of the Legislative Council and noted journalist, died on Monday at the age of 75 from a heart attack in Bidar city. He is survived by his wife, a son, and three daughters.

Paying tribute to Ali, Minister Eshwar Khandre, during a condolence resolution in the Legislative Council, highlighted Ali's significant contributions as a journalist and politician. Ali was the editor and publisher of two newspapers: *Bidar Ki Awaaz* in Hindi and *Surkh Zameen* in Urdu, alongside contributing articles to various publications across the state.

As chairman of the Bidar Urban Development Authority, he played a vital role in the city's development. He also served as the district president of the Congress unit, demonstrating a deep commitment to the growth of Kalyana Karnataka and the broader state.

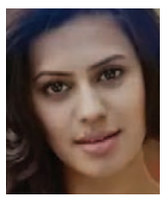
Respects will be paid on Tuesday, 4 March, at 1.30 pm at Jamia Masjid, followed by the final rites at his farm in Bhalki. Minister Khandre extended his deepest condolences, wishing strength to Ali's family and peace for his soul.

—Salar News

B'luru actress detained for alleged gold smuggling

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) detained Kannada actress Ranya Rao at Kempegowda International Airport after seizing 14.8 kg of gold from her possession late on Monday night. Rao, who arrived on an Emirates flight from Dubai, had been under DRI surveillance due to her frequent travels to the city. Officials reported that she wore a lot of gold as jewellery, while also concealing gold bars within her clothing. Ranya is the daughter of a DGP-rank IPS officer serving in State. Officials are probing if she had any backing from law enforcement personnel. *—Salar News*



DKS blames BJP for pending bills

DyCM DK Shivakumar during the Assembly Session at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Tuesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar blamed the previous BJP government for the large backlog of contractor bills in the state. He said the departments under his portfolio are carrying out works worth Rs 1.2 lakh crore.

Shivakumar, who holds Bengaluru development and water resource portfolios, said members of the Karnataka State Contractors' Association met him and requested him to clear the pending bills. "The biggest problem is that when the BJP was in power, contractors did overwork," he said.

"In my departments alone, Rs 1.2 lakh crore worth of work is in progress, but I have a budget of Rs 16,000 crore and a capital of Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 6,000 crore. We can release only Rs 5,000 crore."

Shivakumar said the departments are releasing money based on seniority. However, it has decided to clear the bills of small contractors as early as possible.

'Boost coastal nightlife'

Shivakumar said the lack of a coastal nightlife hurting its tourism and asked legislators to draft a proposal. Despite the region having the highest number of engineering and medical colleges, the many either move to Bengaluru or go to Mumbai or Dubai, he said.

"Why is that? If youngsters don't have entertainment opportunities, they won't stay. If a city or region has to be lively, nightlife should be there. But in the coastal region, it is dead. I have conducted a survey. So, you legislators discuss and submit a report on what should be done," he said. *—PTI*

DKS defends 'scolding' Kannada film industry

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar recently addressed the Kannada film industry, urging it to capitalise on its recent successes for further growth. He acknowledged that his previous comments may have come across as harsh, clarifying that they were intended to benefit the industry.

"Whatever I said about the Kannada film industry is for its good. My words may have sounded harsh due to their rustic nature. I want the Kannada film industry to survive and thrive," he stated.

Shivakumar also responded to criticism from the BJP regarding his straightforward remarks, explaining, "I don't know how to use flowery, urbane language; my words are rustic, frank, and blunt. The media calls me 'bande' (the rock). That is my nature and style. I can refine my style, but the truth is the truth."

Addressing concerns over the film festival and the perceived lack of participation from the industry, he emphasised that it was a state festival rather than a personal event for him or Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. "The film festival was not a personal function of Siddaramaiah or me. It was their programme, and it's natural to expect full participation," he said. He welcomed any feedback on the matter, stating it would be wrong if invitations were not extended to all members of the industry. *—PTI*

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Amid protests, CM stops work at Baldota factory

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday instructed the Koppal collector to stop work at the disputed Baldota factory.

In a post on 'X', the Chief Minister's Office stated that the decision was made after a delegation of activists opposing the factory met with Siddaramaiah on Tuesday and urged him not to allow the project to proceed.

At the recent Global Investors Meet in Bengaluru, the Baldota Group announced plans to invest Rs 54,000 crore to establish an integrated steel plant under its subsidiary, Baldota Steel and Power Ltd (BSPL).

However, the Koppal Parisara Hitarakshana Vedike, a collective of civil society organisations advocating for environmental protection, raised concerns.

They pointed out that Koppal already houses over 200 small and medium industries, and an additional plant with an annual capacity of 10.5 million tonne of steel could lead to further environmental degradation.

On 24 February, the collective called for a bandh to protest against the steel plant.

The call received a strong response, with many shopkeepers and traders voluntarily shutting their businesses for the day in support of the cause.

With public transport, including buses, remaining off the roads and educational institutions closed, Koppal city appeared deserted that day. Thousands of activists from various organisations, along with concerned individuals, took out a protest march from the Gavi Mutt, a religious centre, to the Taluk Stadium, raising slogans against the proposed steel plant. *—PTI*

CM Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the inauguration of 'Vantara', in Jamnagar, Gujarat, Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Modi meets Belgium's Princess for 'unlocking' ties

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday met Princess Astrid of Belgium and said he looks forward to "unlocking limitless opportunities" for the people of the two countries through new partnerships in trade, technology, defence and agriculture. Astrid is in India leading an economic mission that is aimed at shoring up bilateral trade and investment cooperation between the two nations.

"Pleased to meet HRH Princess Astrid of Belgium. Deeply appreciate her initiative to lead a 300-member Economic Mission to India," Modi said on X. "Look forward to unlocking limitless opportunities for our people through new partnerships in trade, technology, defence, agriculture, life sciences, innovation, skilling and academic exchanges." *—PTI*

Speaker chides UP MLA for spitting pan inside Assembly

LUCKNOW, 4 MARCH

Speaker Satish Mahana on Tuesday took exception to a member spitting pan masala on the carpet at the entrance of the main hall of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. He asked all MLAs to prevent such practices and maintain the dignity of the House. As soon as the House met in the morning, Mahana said he came to know that a member has spit pan masala in the House. "I am aware who the member is. The video is available. But I do not want to publicly take a name because I do not intend to insult anyone. The member who did it should come and meet me or I will be forced to summon him," he said. *—PTI*

Gujarat govt begins public consultations for UCC

GANDHINAGAR, 4 MARCH

A high-level committee established by the Gujarat government is set to draft the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), focusing on women's rights and child welfare, according to its chairperson, Justice (retired) Ranjana Desai. The five-member committee held its inaugural meeting in Gujarat's capital, launching a dedicated web portal, www.uccgujarat.in, for public suggestions. Justice Desai emphasised the importance of public consultation, stating that two sub-committees have been formed – one for gathering input and the other for drafting the legislation. The former Supreme Court Justice underlined that the UCC aims to ensure equal rights in marriage and divorce, with emphasis on the registration of all marriages and divorces without altering traditional marriage rituals. *—PTI*

'Step-motherly treatment meted out to Muslims'

LUCKNOW, 4 MARCH

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Tuesday said the Centre and state governments should treat all religions equally but alleged that step-motherly treatment is being meted out to Muslims. In a post in Hindi on X, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said such discrimination can be detrimental to peace and harmony in the society, which is a matter of great concern. "India is a secular country that respects all religions. In such a situation, the central and state governments should treat the followers of all religions equally without any bias, but the step-motherly treatment being meted out to Muslims in religious matters is not justified," she said. *—PTI*

Munde quits after aide is linked to Beed murder

Deshmukh was beaten & urinated upon by the accused & suffered heavy blood loss, says chargesheet

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

Maharashtra minister Dhananjay Munde on Tuesday resigned from the state cabinet, days after his close aide Walmik Karad was named as the mastermind in the Beed sarpanch murder case.

"Dhananjay Munde has submitted his resignation. I have accepted it and forwarded it to Governor CP Radhakrishnan," Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis told reporters at Vidhan Bhawan.

The resignation followed a vociferous demand by the opposition for Munde's removal from the cabinet.

Fadnavis held a late-night meeting with Deputy CM and NCP chief Ajit Pawar on Monday, along with senior NCP leaders, including Munde, to discuss the issue.

The Opposition demand for Munde's resignation intensified after gory photos and court chargesheet details related to the killing of Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh surfaced, revealing the brutalities committed before the murder.

Maha Vikas Aghadi leaders protest against Maharashtra Minister Dhananjay Munde demanding his resignation over the killing of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, in Mumbai *PHOTO: PTI*

As Deshmukh was tortured and killed, the assailants recorded 15 videos, clicked eight photos and even made two video calls, police have said in a chargesheet, documenting the brutality endured by the victim. The videos and the photos are part of the chargesheet submitted by the Crime Investigation Department (CID) before a court in central Maharashtra's Beed district last week.

> Listened to my conscience, considered medical reasons while resigning
>
> -Dhananjay Munde, NCP leader

The videos were shot on a smartphone of one of the accused, Mahesh Kedar, and their duration ranges between 2 seconds and 2.04 minutes, an official said, citing the chargesheet.

As per the official, Deshmukh was beaten up by the accused from 3.30 pm to 6 pm by using a gas pipe of 41-inch length with a handle with black string, white pipe, an iron rod with five clutch wires, wooden sticks, a "fighter and dharkatti" (both sharp weapons).

The video shows Deshmukh in a half-naked condition and forced to sit on the ground.

In another video, accused Sudarshan Ghule is seen forcing Deshmukh to chant "Sudarshan Ghule is the father of all".

Another accused urinates on the sarpanch who is seen bleeding profusely, according to the chargesheet. *—PTI*

> Why Munde's resignation took so long when govt had photos of sarpanch murder
>
> -Supriya Sule, NCP (SP) leader

> Munde's resignation not enough, dismiss Fadnavis govt and impose Prez rule in Maharashtra
>
> -Aaditya Thackeray, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader

> Munde should have resigned earlier, found dignified way out
>
> -Pankaja Munde, Minister

M'RASHTRA ASSEMBLY

Members of the ruling Mahayuti protest against SP MLA Abu Asim Azmi, in Mumbai, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

SP MLA Azmi's Aurangzeb remark sparks uproar

- They claimed Azmi was a descendent of Aurangzeb, who tortured Maratha king Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and brutally killed him

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

The issue of SP MLA Abu Asim Azmi's remarks eulogising Mughal emperor Aurangzeb rocked both houses of the Maharashtra legislature on Tuesday, with members of the ruling Mahayuti demanding his suspension and charging him with treason.

Both the houses were adjourned over the issue.

The development came on a day when the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi planned to corner the government over the resignation of NCP minister Dhananjay Munde.

As proceedings of both the houses began, the Mahayuti members started raising slogans seeking action against Azmi, who is the Samajwadi Party's state president.

They claimed Azmi was a descendent of Aurangzeb, who tortured Maratha king Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and brutally killed him.

Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena head Eknath Shinde led the attack on Azmi both in the legislative council and assembly.

In the council, the former CM said Azmi also made objectionable statements in the past against Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

"Abu Azmi is purposely insulting Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and (his son) Chhatrapati Sambhaji. Sambhaji's Maharaj's bravery and Aurangzeb's cruelty will give goosebumps to people," Shinde said in the council.

In the assembly, Shinde dubbed Azmi a "traitor" and said had no right to sit in the House.

He asked SP MLA Raees Shaikh to watch the recent Hindi film 'Chhaava', which has documented the bravery and sacrifice of Sambhaji Maharaj. *—PTI*

Give details on removal of convicted politicians: SC to EC

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

In a significant development, the Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Election Commission of India to provide details of cases in which it had either removed or reduced the period of disqualification from electoral rolls of leaders post their conviction in criminal cases.

A bench comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Manmohan asked the poll panel to furnish within two weeks details of such cases in which it exercised its power under Section 11 of the Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951.

Under the RPA, the period of disqualification from electoral politics post-conviction in criminal cases varies depending on the offence and sentence.

PHOTO: PTI

In cases relating to imprisonment of two or more years, a person is disqualified from the date of conviction until six years after their release, even if they are out on bail or awaiting appeal.

However, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is empowered under Section 11 of the Act to remove or reduce the period of disqualification after recording the reasons.

The bench said PIL petitioner Ashwini Upadhyay and others could file a rejoinder to the EC's response within two weeks after the details were furnished by the poll panel.

The 2016 PIL, filed through advocate Ashwani Dubey, sought a life ban on convicted politicians aside from the expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs in the country. *—PTI*

ED ARRESTS SDPI NATIONAL PREZ MK FAIZY

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Enforcement Directorate has arrested SDPI national president MK Faizy under the anti-money laundering law, sources said on Tuesday.

The Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), founded in 2009 and headquartered in Delhi, is alleged to be the political front of the now banned Popular Front of India (PFI).

Faizy, according to the sources, was taken into custody on Monday night from the Delhi international airport under the PMLA.

The ED had earlier called SDPI as the "political front" of PFI. The PFI was banned by the Union government in September, 2022 calling it an "unlawful association". *—PTI*

KERALA ASSEMBLY URGES CENTRE TO WITHDRAW DEEP-SEA MINING PLAN

T'PURAM, 4 MARCH

The Kerala assembly on Tuesday passed a resolution urging the central government to withdraw its move to allow deep-sea mineral mining off the coast of the state.

The resolution moved by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was passed amidst the opposition UDF MLAs protesting in front of the Speaker's dais accusing him of acting as an "agent" of the ruling front.

The UDF MLAs were protesting for not allowing the Leader of the Opposition in the state assembly V D Satheesan to complete his speech before walking out as their demand to adjourn the business of the house to discuss ASHA workers' protest was not accepted.

Due to this protest, the deep-sea mining resolution was passed without discussion.

PHOTO: PTI

The Kerala government has already made it clear that the Centre's move to initiate deep-sea mining along the state's coast cannot be allowed at any cost and the concern of the state's fishermen community in this regard has already been conveyed to the union government.

According to the committee leaders, the Centre has decided to auction sand blocks for offshore mining in five sectors Kollam South, Kollam North, Alappuzha, Ponnani and Chavakkad. As part of the protest, the committee plans to hold a Parliament march on 12 March. *—PTI*

'Interpol to probe Gogoi, ISI link'

GUWAHATI, 4 MARCH

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said his government may seek the help of agencies like the Interpol in investigating the alleged interference of Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, who allegedly has links with Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's British wife, in India's internal affairs.

Sarma, however, said the probe is at an initial stage and he has already informed Union Home Minister Amit Shah about the developments in the case.

"The matter is very sensitive. I have informed the home minister about the issue. The SIT is doing its investigation, but we can do our probe until a certain level only. We may have to take the help of agencies like Interpol at a certain stage," he told reporters here.

Sheikh, an advisor of the Pakistan Planning Commission and a former colleague of Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn, was charged under various sections of the Bhartiya Nyay Sanhtia (BNS) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act or UAPA.

Sarma and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha, alleging that his wife has connections with the ISI. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

BJP accuses DMK of prioritising politics over edu

CHENNAI, 4 MARCH

K Annamalai, the Tamil Nadu BJP chief, has accused the ruling DMK of placing political interests above the future of children in a heated exchange over the National Education Policy (NEP). In a social media post, DMK deputy general secretary Kanimozhi challenged Annamalai to secure the release of overdue education funds from the Centre, criticising the BJP for withholding Rs 2,152 crore in Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) funds.

Kanimozhi claimed that the BJP's statistics were manipulated, asserting that the DMK government was conducting its own survey to assess the real impact of education policies in the state. She praised initiatives like Illam Thedi Kalvi and the breakfast scheme as evidence of Tamil Nadu's commitment to improving education.

Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin pressed the BJP-led Centre on why no institutions have been established to teach Tamil in northern states. *—PTI*

SC takes note as Cong says 72 killed in Assam

GUWAHATI, 4 MARCH

The opposition Congress in Assam has condemned the BJP government, led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, for what they call a "police raj", following official data revealing that 72 individuals have been killed and 220 injured in police actions since Sarma took office in May 2021.

Leader of the Opposition, Debabrata Saikia, urged the Supreme Court to take suo motu cognisance of the troubling statistics amid ongoing hearings regarding alleged fake encounters in Assam. He stated that the Supreme Court should consider these revelations before finalising verdict..

The report highlighted that 38 individuals died while in police remand, while another 34 fatalities occurred during police custody prior to remand.

Saikia described the situation as indicative of a "total police raj", alleging that the ruling party is exploiting the police for political ends. *—PTI*

'MY FATHER VS YOUR FATHER' SHOWDOWN

Tejashwi, Nitish clash in Bihar Assembly

PATNA, 4 MARCH

Bihar assembly witnessed a heated exchange on Tuesday between the leader of the opposition Tejashwi Yadav and members of the ruling NDA, over functioning of the Nitish Kumar government.

Yadav, who was participating in a discussion on the governor's address to a joint session of the bicameral legislature, made a scathing attack on the state government.

"'Sarkar khatara, system khatara, mukhyamantri thaka hara, aadmi ghoom raha mara mara' (the government is like a rickety old car, the system is defunct, the CM is a spent force and the people are distraught," asserted Yadav.

Taking potshots at leaders of both BJP and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U), he reminded Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary of their roots in what is now called the INDIA bloc.

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav in Bihar assembly *PHOTO: PTI*

Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, who is a senior JD(U) leader, rose to say, "I admit having been in the Congress. But the leader of the opposition has said a lot about efforts made by his father (RJD president Lalu Prasad) to set right the wrongs committed by the past governments.

In effect, he has attacked the Congress, his own alliance partner".

To Yadav's charge that as a Congress minister Chaudhary had made a fortune till the party was voted out of power in 1990, the JD(U) leader replied, "I have been your cabinet colleague, too. I always do my job. It is some other people who use power to build a fortune".

The allusion was to numerous corruption cases against the RJD supremo and his family members.

However, an unfazed Yadav trained his guns at Samrat Choudhary, a BJP leader whom the former had preceded as the deputy chief minister. *—PTI*

Teen left critical after being set ablaze in Mumbai

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

A 17-year-old girl is fighting for her life with 60 per cent burns following an alleged arson attack by a 30-year-old man in Andheri, Mumbai. The accused, Jitendra alias Jitu Tambe, reportedly set the girl ablaze after she was warned by her mother not to meet him. The incident occurred late on Sunday night behind a hospital while the victim was with friends. She suffers severe injuries to her face, neck, and other body parts and is currently receiving treatment at Dr R N Cooper Hospital. The girl reportedly stated, "I am not at fault, Jitu poured petrol on my body and set me on fire" when her mother arrived on the scene. The police have launched an investigation and the accused is also in hospital with burns. —*PTI*

Trial phase of Carbide waste burning ends in MP

INDORE, 4 MARCH

The first phase of trial incineration of 10 tonnes of toxic waste from the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy has been successfully completed at a facility in Pithampur, Madhya Pradesh. Officials confirmed that gas emissions during the incineration process remained within permissible limits. The waste, transported from the defunct Union Carbide factory in Bhopal, began incineration on 28 February and concluded on 4 March, monitored by the Pollution Control Board. The second phase, with an additional 10 tonnes to be incinerated, is scheduled for 4 March. The Madhya Pradesh High Court mandated this process, directing authorities to submit trial reports by 27 March. The Bhopal disaster, a catastrophic gas leak, resulted in thousands of fatalities and serious health issues, marking one of the worst industrial disasters in history. —*PTI*

8,000 Jharkhand govt schools have just 1 teacher each

RANCHI, 4 MARCH

As many as 7,930 state-run schools in Jharkhand are functioning with a single teacher each, Education Minister Ramdas Soren said on Tuesday. In a written response to a question by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Raj Sinha in the assembly on the crisis of teachers, he said 3.81 lakh students are enrolled in these single-teacher schools. Later, speaking in the House, Soren said that 103 schools are functioning without any students, and 17 teachers work in them. "We are running a campaign on the lines of 'School Chalo Abhiyan' in the respective areas so that students could be brought back," he said. The minister said the recruitment of 26,000 assistant teachers is under process —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Residents receive eviction notices for Yamuna project

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

An upcoming anti-encroachment initiative in the Usmanpur area of Shahdara has left local residents in distress, receiving just a day's notice to vacate their homes, some of which they have inhabited for decades. On 2 March, the authorities issued eviction notices, requiring residents to leave by Monday as part of the Yamuna beautification project scheduled for demolition on Tuesday and Wednesday. For many, the land represents a lifetime of memories and hard work. The Delhi Police confirmed that over 1,500 officers would be deployed to maintain order during the eviction process, to ensure law and order. —*PTI*

Calling someone Pakistani in poor taste, not a crime: SC

SC says it does not hurt religious sentiments, discharges man

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court held using terms such as 'miyan-tiyan" and "Pakistani" was not an offence of hurting religious sentiments. The court however, such remarks are made in poor taste.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma therefore discharged a man accused of calling a government servant 'Pakistani.' The case was filed by a Urdu translator and acting Right to Information (RTI) clerk in the sub-divisional office in Chas, Jharkhand.

The 11 February court order said, "The appellant is accused of hurting the religious feelings of the informant by calling him 'miyan-tiyan' and 'Pakistani'. Undoubtedly, the statements made are poor taste. However, it does not amount to hurting the religious sentiments of the informant. Hence, we are of the opinion that the appellant shall also be discharged under Section 298 IPC."

Section 298 of IPC deals with words or gestures made with a deliberate intent to wound religious feelings.

Hari Nandan Singh had sought information under the RTI Act from additional collector-cum-first appellate authority, in Bokaro. The information was subsequently dispatched to him but he filed an appeal after allegedly manipulating the documents, claiming that the information he received was tampered with.

PHOTO: PTI

- The Supreme Court held that using terms such as 'miyan-tiyan" and "Pakistani" was not tantamount to hurting religious sentiments.

The appellate authority directed the translator to personally deliver the information to Singh.

On 18 November, 2020, the informant, accompanied by the messenger of the sub-divisional office, Chas, went to the accused's home to hand over the information. Singh initially refused to accept the documents but later agreed after some persuasion.

It was alleged that he abused the informant, referring to his faith and used criminal force against him. The matter prompted the translator to file an FIR against Singh. —*PTI*

SC slams Telangana over 'delay' in MLAs' disqualification plea

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court issued notices to the Telangana government and others on the pleas alleging delay by the assembly speaker in deciding the petitions for disqualification of BRS MLAs who defected to the Congress.

A bench comprising Justices BR Gavai and Augustine Gerorge Masih posted the hearing on 25 March.

The bench sought responses of the state government, speaker's officer, Telangana legislative assembly secretary, Election Commission of India and the defected lawmakers before the next date of hearing.

While one of the pleas challenges the November 2024 order of the Telangana High Court over the disqualification of three BRS MLAs who joined the ruling Congress, the other petition is over the remaining seven legislators who defected —*PTI*

'HOSPITALS FLEECING PATIENTS'

SC asks states to check pvt hospitals for unfair pricing

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court left it to the states to take appropriate policy decisions to protect patients and their attendants from being "fleeced" and taken "undue advantage" by medical institutions.

The apex court also stressed that any mandatory direction by it may hamper the functioning of private hospitals.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh disposed of a PIL filed by a law student Siddharth Dalmia and his advocate father Vijay Pal Dalmia that alleged that the private hospitals compel the patients and their attendants to purchase medicines from in-house pharmacies or those with which they have collaboration where they are charged higher rates for medicines, implants and medical devices in such facilities.

Noting that health is a state subject, the bench said relevant regulatory measures can be taken by the state governments.

Highlighting that the issue falls in the policy domain, the bench said it is for the policymakers to take a holistic view of the matter and frame appropriate guidelines ensuring there is no exploitation of the patients and their attendants and, at the same time, there is no discouragement and an unreasonable restriction for the private entities.

The court however noted that Article 21 of the Constitution includes the right to better health facilities.

Taking note of the Centre's stand that there is no compulsion upon the patients or their attendants to take medicines, implants or medical equipment from hospital pharmacies or from a specific shop, the bench wondered whether it would be prudent for the Union or States to introduce a policy which regulates each and every activity of the private hospitals.

On 14 May, 2018, the had court agreed to hear the PIL which alleged that the prices of medicines, medical devices and medical consumables were inflated in collaboration and connivance with the drug manufacturers.

It contended that by taking advantage of the ignorance, plight and adverse circumstances of patients in hospitals across India, people were being compelled to buy medicines from their in-house pharmacies. —*PTI*

NHRC orders probe into student's death at KIIT, report by 10 March

BHUBANESWAR, 4 MARCH

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has mandated an on-site inquiry into the tragic death of 20-year-old Prakriti Lamsal, a Nepalese student at KIIT University in Odisha, who allegedly died by suicide in her hostel room on 16 February. The NHRC acted upon a complaint which claimed that Lamsal had faced harassment from her ex-boyfriend, with her pleas for assistance to the university's International Relations Office reportedly ignored.

In response to this serious matter, the NHRC directed its Registrar (Law) to conduct the inquiry at KIIT, accompanied by a team that includes two officers from the investigation division and one law division officer. A report is expected by 10 March 2025.

The complainant, Ashutosh B, alleged that protests by Nepalese students seeking justice were met with hostility from university officials and security personnel. The police have arrested one engineering student for abetment and apprehended ten KIIT staff for their involvement in the alleged mistreatment of protesting students.

KIIT has issued an apology, and the Odisha government has established a high-level committee to investigate the incident. Both the state government and KIIT have urged Nepalese students to return to campus, assuring their safety and dignity. The Nepalese NHRC has also called for a thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding Lamsal's death. —*PTI*

Security deployed at the KIIT after tensions flared up following the alleged suicide of a girl student from Nepal PHOTO: PTI

'SKM SUPPRESSED'

Farmer leaders face police raids ahead of Chandigarh protest

CHANDIGARH, 4 MARCH

Leaders of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) have claimed that Punjab police conducted early morning raids on the residences of several farmer leaders in Punjab, detaining some ahead of a planned protest in Chandigarh on 5 March. The alleged police action follows an unsuccessful meeting between Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and SKM representatives the previous day.

Harinder Singh Lakhowal, general secretary of the Bharti Kisan Union (Lakhowal), accused the police of attempting to suppress the farmers' voices. "Such actions cannot stifle us," he declared, emphasising the right to protest and urging farmers to gather in Chandigarh en masse. He noted that police personnel were stationed at his residence.

Mukesh Chander Sharma, vice president of the BKU (Rajewal), reported that police raided his home at 4 am, condemning the actions as unwarranted.

The broken talks saw a frustrated Mann leave the meeting abruptly, although he later stated that he remains open to dialogue, urging farmers to avoid causing public inconvenience during protests.

The SKM, known for its role in the 2020 agitation against three now-repealed farm laws, is advocating for several demands, including a legal guarantee for minimum support prices and a law for debt settlement.

They are also calling for the cessation of land acquisitions for the Bharatmala projects. —*PTI*

SKM leaders claimed that several protesters were detained in the early hours of Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

Day 11 on, yet no signs of workers in T'gana tunnel

NAGARKURNOOL, 4 MARCH

The rescue operation inside the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel was progressing at a rapid pace on the 11th day of the accident, officials said. They are confident that the damaged conveyor belt would be operational during the day.

There were however, no breakthrough in the efforts to locate the eight trapped persons. Rescuers are working in three shifts every day, an official told PTI.

The conveyor belt which suffered damage following the accident is expected to be operational today, he said. The belt would be useful in shifting the muck and other debris out of the tunnel with ease, eliminating one the biggest challenges in the operation.

Earlier a police official on Monday said the state government is exploring the option of deploying robots in the rescue operation.

Eight persons have been trapped in the Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project tunnel since 22 February. Experts from the NDRF, Indian Army, Navy and other agencies are involved in trying to pull them out to safety.

Meanwhile, the Telangana High Court on Monday disposed of a PIL which sought directions to authorities to expeditiously take all necessary steps to facilitate the safe and swift extraction of the eight persons.

The state government's Disaster Management department had said that 18 organisations, 54 officials and 703 people are involved in the rescue operation. —*PTI*

Vigilantes kill cattle transporter in Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 4 MARCH

In a harrowing incident in Palwal district, Haryana, two men were brutally assaulted and thrown into a canal by alleged cow vigilantes, resulting in the death of one victim.

Police confirmed that five out of the eleven accused have been arrested.

The altercation occurred on 22 February when the truck, transporting cattle from Rajasthan to Lucknow, lost its way. The attackers, travelling on motorcycles, intercepted the vehicle on suspicion of cow smuggling. According to police statements, the driver and his helper were severely beaten before being thrown into a nearby canal.

While the truck driver, Balkishan, managed to swim to safety, the body of the helper, Sandeep, was recovered from the canal on Sunday.

Preliminary post-mortem reports indicated that Sandeep had sustained multiple grievous injuries.

Identified as Devraj, Nikhil, Naresh, Pawan, and Pankaj, the arrested suspects hail from Palwal, Gurugram, and Nuh districts. —*PTI*

HC stays protesting Jamia students' suspensions

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

While staying the suspension of Jamia Millia Islamia students barred from the university campus, the Delhi High Court said participation in such peaceful protests were the part of the "training to inculcate the basic principles and norms of civil society".

Justice Dinesh Kumar Sharma also found the manner in which the university handled the protest worrisome.

"Without going into the veracity of the submissions of either of the parties, the perusal of the record itself made the court worry about the way the protest, being undertaken by the students, is handled by the university.

The court is not looking at the reason for the protest at the moment but the documents as shown by the petitioners prima facie show that it was a peaceful protest," the court said.

The high court ordered the constitution of a "peace" committee of university officials under the supervision of the vice-chancellor to resolve the issue and calm the situation down, and said they should also involve student representatives in the discussions.

The suspensions were stayed till 2 April on four separate pleas of seven students who were suspended and barred from the campus by a 12 February order of the proctor.

The university was directed to file a report in the matter within a week.

Delhi Police had detained some protesting students in February. —*PTI*

ACTIVISTS FUME

Negligence blamed for U'khand avalanche

GOPESHWAR, 4 MARCH

Social activists blamed the death of eight workers in an avalanche that hit a BRO camp at Mana in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district last week on "administrative negligence".

They said the lives could have been saved if authorities paid heed to alerts. They also blame "reckless construction" works in avalanche-prone areas for the rise in snowslide incidents.

Atul Sati, convener of Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti said negligence led to the deaths. "There was an avalanche warning and authorities should have acted on time," he said.

"When there was a warning and the authorities were aware that a large number of workers were in Mana, why weren't they advised to move to safety?" asked another social activist.

The weather office in Dehradun issued a yellow alert for 27 February, two days in advance, predicting isolated heavy rain and snowfall in locations situated at 3,500 metres and above. However, the State Emergency Operations Centre alerted the district magistrates concerned on 28 February, when the avalanche had already happened.

The avalanche hit the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp in Chamoli trapping 54 workers. While 46 were rescued alive, eight were found dead. Over the last four years, two dwelling units of BRO workers have been destroyed by avalanches in the Chamoli district alone.

An avalanche in April 2021 destroyed a settlement of workers in Niti Valley adjoining the Indo-Tibet border, killing as many labourers. —*PTI*

Although the weather office issued a yellow alert two days in advance, district magistrates were only informed after the avalanche PHOTO: X

Wrestler Sushil Kumar gets bail in murder case

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Delhi High Court has granted bail to Olympic wrestler Sushil Kumar, who has been incarcerated for over three years in connection with the murder of former junior national wrestling champion Sagar Dhankar at the Chhatrasal Stadium in May 2021. Justice Sanjeev Narula approved the bail request, requiring Kumar to furnish a personal bond of Rs 50,000 and two sureties of the same amount.

Kumar, along with co-accused, allegedly fatally assaulted Dhankar and his friends during an altercation over a property dispute. A post-mortem report indicated that Dhankar suffered serious cerebral damage from a blunt object.

Advocate RK Malik, representing Kumar, highlighted that while the prosecution listed 200 witnesses, only 31 were examined to date. Despite opposition from the prosecution, Malik argued that the prolonged trial justified granting bail to Kumar. —*PTI*

MASKED FUN

Performers known as Gilles at the Carnival of Blinche in Belgium. During the parade, they are known to throw oranges at the crowd. The festival precedes Ash Wednesday, a holy prayer day in many Christian denominations
PHOTO: PTI

Trump's past with Russia reason for Ukraine fallout

As his White House meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart devolved into a stunning blowup, President Donald Trump leaned on a familiar refrain to explain his unique kinship with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

"Putin went through a hell of a lot with me," Trump said Friday, raising his voice and gesturing with his hands as he recounted the long-since-concluded saga of a federal investigation in which both he and the Russian president played starring roles.

"He went through a phony witch hunt where they used him and Russia. Russia, Russia, Russia, ever hear of that deal?" Trump said.

The reference to the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election underscored the extent to which Trump's lingering fury over an inquiry he has misleadingly branded a "hoax" remains top of mind more than eight years after it began.

It also showed that Trump's view of a war Russia launched against Ukraine three years ago is coloured not only by his relationship with Putin and the alliance he believes they share but also by his fraught past with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was a central player in the first of two impeachment cases against Trump during his first four years in office.

Questions over Trump's connections to Putin followed him into his first presidency and hung over him for most of his term, spurring investigations by the Justice Department and Congress and the appointment of a special counsel who brought criminal charges against multiple Trump allies.

While running for office, Trump cast doubt on the idea that Russian government hackers had stolen the emails of Democrats, including his 2016 rival Hillary Clinton, and orchestrated their public release in an effort to boost his candidacy and harm hers.

Then, as president, he broke with his own intelligence community's firm finding that Russia alone was to blame for the hack. In July 2018, while meeting with Putin in Helsinki, Trump appeared to embrace the Russian leader's protestations over the conclusions of US intelligence officials by saying, "I don't see any reason why it would be" Russia.

US President Donald Trump's stance on Ukraine seems coloured by his previous usages of foreign powers to influence domestic US elections
PHOTO: PTI

All the while, he memorably raged against the investigation, calling it a "hoax" and "witch hunt" and, as he did at the White House last week.

If Trump's history with Russia appears to have contributed to his worldview of the current conflict, so too has his past with Ukraine.

He held a call in 2019 with Zelenskyy and pushed him to investigate corruption allegations against Democratic rival Joe Biden and Biden's son Hunter ahead of the 2020 election, which Joe Biden went on to win.

The call — which included Trump's memorable line: "I would like you to do us a favour, though" — was reported to congressional leaders and to a government watchdog by a CIA officer-turned-whistleblower who said the president appeared to be soliciting interference from a foreign country in the US election.

After Trump's call with Zelenskyy, the White House temporarily halted US aid to the struggling ally facing hostile Russian forces at its border. The money was eventually released as Congress intervened.

Trump was subsequently impeached by the House but acquitted by the Senate.

The long-term repercussions of the Oval Office spat, in which Trump called Zelenskyy "disrespectful" in the most hostile public exchange in memory between world leaders at the White House, remain to be seen.

But the immediate consequences are clear: Zelenskyy left Washington without signing a minerals deal.

In Russia, officials are relishing the conflict, sensing an opportunity to move closer to the US and bring about a halt in American aid for Kyiv. That window seemed to open last month when the US, in a dramatic reversal, split from European allies by refusing to blame Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

In an interview with a Russian state TV reporter that aired Sunday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the new US administration is "rapidly changing all foreign policy configurations".

"This largely coincides with our vision," he added. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

'Happy Birthday' song celebrates 101st birthday

UTTHARA KUMARI B

- The arrangement of the lyrics and the melody if Happy Birthday to You originally appeared in print in 1912, although it probably existed earlier

Imagine singing Happy Birthday to the Happy Birthday song!

The song was born (first published) this day a 101 years ago--- 4 March, 1924.

Did we ever pause to think how and when this song was born?

There have been traditions and traditions, But this is one tradition that has stood the test of time around the world.

Why, even during Covid 2019, medical experts advised us to sing 'Happy Birthday' while hand-washing to ensure sufficient cleansing!

When I thought about this song, I decided to find out more about it. O

ut of curiosity, I searched the net to know about the origin of this song. There were a host of articles on the topic, enough to confuse one.

After delving deep, I got some information.

How did this song come about? Its musical journey started with Good Morning to all to Good Morning to you to Happy Birthday to You.

This is one of the easy tunes many of us learn as kids, but the history of the song is anything but simple ---- it dates back to the late 19th century and is fraught with decades-long legal battles.

But now you can sing the song freely as a federal judge in the US had ruled some years ago that Happy Birthday is in the public domain and can't be owned by any one company.

Although there is controversy regarding its origin, further research has shown me that the tune as we all know today as 'Happy Birthday', was originally written in the late 1800s as 'Good Morning to All.' It was attributed to two sisters ---- Mildred J. Hill (born 1859) and Patty Smith Hill (born 1868).

The sisters said that they wanted to create a song that would be easy for the children to sing and hence wrote it for kindergarteners in Louisville, Kentucky. There are theories that they may have been inspired by the tune and lyrical ideas from other existing songs then, such as 'Happy Greetings to All' 'Good Night to You All,' 'A Happy New Year to All,' and 'A Happy Greeting to All.'

Patty was a schoolteacher. Mildred was an educator who later on became a composer, organist and pianist.

The melody was composed by Mildred and the lyrics were written by Patty, but it was originally for a classroom greeting song titled 'Good Morning to All.'

This song was part of the book Song Stories for the Kindergarten which the sisters co-wrote and published in 1893.

It is said the sisters assigned the copyright for 'Good Morning to All' to Clayton F Summy company in 1983 in exchange for a cut of the songbook's royalties.

From then on the lyrics were changed from their original form to 'Good Morning to You' and then to 'Happy Birthday to You.'

It is still unclear who changed the lyrics that turned it into a birthday song and when it was first published in its original form.

The arrangement of the melody and lyrics found in 'Happy Birthday to You' originally appeared in print back in the year 1912

However, it may have probably existed even earlier than that.

Research shows that it was first published, as we know the song today, on 4 March, 1924, in a book edited by Robert H. Coleman.

Claims, controversies, legal battles.....never mind all this. No one can deny the cultural impact the song has had on the world ... not a day passes without someone singing it in some corner of the world.

101 Cheers to Happy Birthday song!

The writer, a veteran journalist, worked with The New Indian Express and The Times of India and in senior positions. After four decades in active journalism, she now does freelance work.

The tune, now known as Happy Birthday, was written in 1800s as Good Morning to All ***PHOTO:PIXABAY***

440 million may be overweight in India by 2050: Lancet study

- About 16 million boys and over 14 million girls in India, aged 5-14 years, could be overweight and obese by 2050, making it world's second highest after China

By 2050, India could have over 440 million obese and overweight people, a global analysis published in The Lancet journal has estimated.

Number of overweight and obese adults by mid-century in India (218 million men and 231 million women) could be the second highest in the world, after China, with the US, Brazil and Nigeria expected to rank third, fourth and fifth, respectively, the findings by an international team of researchers reveal.

These researchers, including those from the Indian Council of Medical Research, collaborated for the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Study 2021.

As per the study, already almost half the world's adults -- a billion men and over a billion women aged 25 years and above -- were overweight and obese in 2021. In India, the numbers were over nearly 180 million -- 81 million men and 98 million women.

However, by 2050, this number globally could rise to nearly 3.8 billion -- 1.8 billion men and 1.9 billion women -- "over half of the likely global adult population at that time", the authors said.

"While China, India, and the USA will continue to constitute a large proportion of the global population with overweight and obesity, the number in the sub-Saharan Africa super-region is forecasted to increase by 254.8 per cent," they wrote.

The Lancet Journal ***PHOTO:GAIN***

The researchers also estimated that about 16 million boys and over 14 million girls in India, aged 5-14 years, could be overweight and obese by 2050, making it world's second highest after China.

However, in the 15-24 age group, the world's highest burden could come from India, with over 22 million men and nearly 17 million women in the country suffering from this health crisis in 2050.

Lead author Emmanuela Gakidou, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), University of Washington, US, which coordinates the GBD study, noted the seriousness.

"The unprecedented global epidemic of overweight and obesity is a profound tragedy and a monumental societal failure," Gakidou said.

The study, the "most comprehensive global analysis to date", could help governments and the public health community "identify priority populations experiencing the greatest burdens of obesity who require immediate intervention and treatment, and those that remain predominantly overweight and should be primarily targeted with prevention strategies", Gakidou said.

Nearly 180 million people are currently obese or overweight in India ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

The latest estimates come against the backdrop of Prime Minister Narendra Modi making a strong pitch for combating obesity in his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' radiocast on 23 February.

Obesity will have to be dealt with to be a fit and healthy nation, he said.

Obesity, a body mass index (BMI) of over 30, is known to have wide-ranging effects, including raising one's risk of metabolic and heart disease.

It can also impact one's bone health and fertility and increase cancer risk.

However, experts recently called for a more nuanced approach to measuring obesity.

In January, authors of a Lancet Commission report urged an overhaul of how obesity is diagnosed and called for a new method that looked at aspects such as waist circumference or waist-to-hip ratio, in addition to BMI.

BMI is not an honest measure of health or disease and can thus result in a wrong diagnosis, they said.

The team suggested two new categories for diagnosing obesity, which are "objective measures" of illness in an individual -- 'clinical obesity' and 'pre-clinical obesity'.

While clinical obesity refers to a chronic, or persistent, condition because of an obesity-related organ dysfunction, pre-clinical obesity is related to an increased health risk without illness, they explained. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FB

Violence in Kenyan refugee camp over food

NAIROBI, 4 MARCH

Four people sustained gunshot wounds as police clashed with protesters in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp. Thousands of refugees in the camp, which hosts people fleeing from conflict and drought in neighbouring South Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi and Congo, protested on Monday against food rationing due to funding constraints. The World Food Program (WFP), which is in charge of food distribution at the refugee camp, said in December that the food rations to refugee camps were "at 45 per cent of the minimum food basket due to resource constraints". The WFP had warned for years that it was facing funds crunch, and on Monday it announced closure of its office in South Africa due to US President Donald Trump's cuts in foreign aid. *—PTI*

Seven days on, Japan's forest fire continues to rage

TOKYO, 4 MARCH

Japan is fighting a forest fire that has damaged dozens of homes and forced hundreds of residents to evacuate in a northeastern coastal city. The fire has burned about 5,190 acres of forest in Ofunato since it started on Wednesday, said the country's Fire and Disaster Management Agency. It said the fire destroyed 84 homes and forced evacuation of more than 1,200 people. The fire has subsided in some areas. More than 2,000 troops and and firefighters have been deployed from across the country. A man was found dead on a road Thursday, and authorities are examining if the death was linked to the fire, the agency said. The northeast regions, including Ofunato, have had their driest winter since 1946. *—PTI*

Last-minute glitch stalls Starship rocket launch

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

Last-minute problems forced a launch delay for SpaceX's 123-metre rocket Starship on Monday, attempting a comeback following an explosion on the last test flight. The countdown got down to 40 seconds, but it was halted because of issues with the rocket, the world's largest and most powerful. Starship was supposed to blast off from the southern tip of Texas with four mock satellites on board for a test flight. If the problems can be fixed quickly, another launch attempt could come Tuesday, according to SpaceX. The last Starship demo ended in an explosion over the Atlantic in January, with debris streaming over the Turks and Caicos. *—PTI*

German cops to quiz man who mowed down two

MANNHEIM, 4 MARCH

Investigators on Tuesday will question a driver who allegedly rammed a car into a crowd in the southwestern German city of Mannheim, killing two people and injuring 11. Andreas Stenger, head of the State Criminal Police Office, told German news agency DPA that police hope the interview will lead to information about a motive for Monday's attack. Mourners left flowers in the city's centre to honour the victims. The suspect is a 40-year-old German man from the nearby state of Rhineland-Palatinate who was detained and is in a hospital after being injured, State Interior Minister Thomas Strobl of Baden-Württemberg, which includes Mannheim, said on Monday. Strobl said there was not extremist or religious background to the incident at the moment. *—PTI*

US tariffs on Canada, Mexico take effect

Beijing retaliates 20% tariff with 15% levy on US farm exports

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

President Donald Trump's long-threatened tariffs against Canada and Mexico went into effect Tuesday, putting global markets on edge and setting up costly retaliations by the United States' North American allies.

Starting just past midnight, imports from Canada and Mexico are now to be taxed at 25 per cent, with Canadian energy products subject to 10 per cent import duties.

The 10 per cent tariff that Trump placed on Chinese imports in February was doubled to 20 per cent, and Beijing retaliated Tuesday with tariffs of up to 15 per cent on a wide array of US farm exports.

It also expanded the number of US companies subject to export controls and other restrictions by about two dozen.

China has also initiated legal action against the US under the World Trade Organisation dispute settlement mechanism regarding the latter's tariff increase on Chinese products, the Ministry of Commerce said Tuesday.

The unilateral imposition of tariffs by the US undermines the multilateral trading system, increases the burden on American businesses and consumers, and erodes the foundation of China-US economic and trade cooperation, the commission said.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his country would slap tariffs on more than USD 100 billion of American goods over the course of 21 days. Mexico did not immediately detail any retaliatory measures.

The US president's moves have raised fears of higher inflation and the prospect of a devastating trade war. *—PTI*

While Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau **(L)** said his country would respond to US President Donald Trump's move with tariffs on more than USD 100B of American goods over the course of 21 days, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo is yet to react *PHOTO: X*

TSMC mulls $100B expansion in US

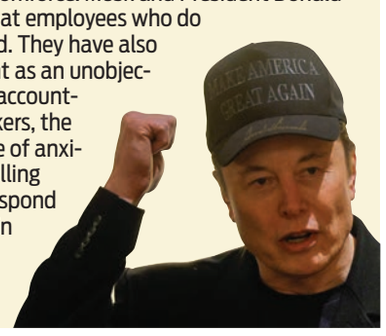
WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

Chip giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co plans to invest USD 100B in the United States, President Donald Trump has said, on top of USD 65B in investments the company had previously announced. TSMC, the world's biggest semiconductor manufacturer, produces chips for companies including Apple, Intel and Nvidia. It is already constructing three plants in Arizona after the Biden administration offered billions in subsidies. Its first factory in Arizona has started mass production of its 4-nanometre chips. Trump, who met TSMC CEO CC Wei at the White House on Monday, called it a "tremendous move" and "a matter of economic security". *—PTI*

Fed staff face second Musk deadline

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

Federal employees face a midnight deadline to comply with Elon Musk's second demand for reports on their recent accomplishments, a request that has become a flashpoint within the government workforce. Musk and President Donald Trump have suggested that employees who do not comply could get fired. They have also described the requirement as an unobjectionable way to increase accountability. But for many workers, the request has been a source of anxiety. Some agencies are telling their workforces not to respond or to limit what they say in response, just as they did after Musk's first request last month. *—PTI*



US Senate votes against ban on trans athletes

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

Legislation that aimed to bar transgender women and girls nationwide from participating in school athletic competitions designated for female athletes failed to advance in a divided US Senate as Democrats stood united against an issue that Republicans leveraged in last year's elections.

A test vote on the bill on Monday night failed in the Senate on a party-line 51–45 vote. The bill sought to determine Title IX protections "based solely on a person's reproductive biology and genetics at birth". The vote came as Republicans have homed in repeatedly on the social cause, casting it as an issue of ensuring athletic fairness for women and girls.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order last month giving federal agencies wide latitude to ensure entities that receive federal funding abide by Title IX in alignment with the administration's view, which interprets "sex" as the gender someone was assigned at birth. *—PTI*

DAMAGE CONTROL

EU mulls $841B plan to balance US exit

BRUSSELS, 4 MARCH

The chief of the European Union's executive on Tuesday proposed an USD 841B plan to beef up defences of EU nations to lessen the impact of potential US disengagement and provide Ukraine with military muscle to negotiate with Russia following the freeze of US aid to the embattled nation.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the massive "REARM Europe" package will be put to the 27 EU leaders who will meet in Brussels on Thursday in an emergency meeting following a week of increasing political uncertainty from Washington, where President Donald Trump questioned both his alliance to the continent and the defence of Ukraine.

"I do not need to describe the grave nature of the threats that we face," von der Leyen said.

Key to the quandary of EU nations has been an unwillingness to spend much on defense over the past decades as they hid under the US nuclear umbrella and a sluggish economy, which creates challenges for a quick ramp-up of such spending.

Ursula von der Leyen *PHOTO: EU*

- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the massive "REARM Europe" package will be put to the 27 EU leaders who will meet in Brussels on Thursday

Von der Leyen said the first task is to loosen the fiscal constraints the EU puts on budgetary spending to "allow member states to significantly increase their defence expenditures without triggering" punishing rules aimed at keeping deficits from going too far into the red.

"If member states would increase their defence spending by 1.5 per cent of GDP on average, this could create fiscal space of close to USD 683B over a period of four years," von der Leyen said. *—PTI*

China hints at hiking defence budget

BEIJING, 4 MARCH

China on Tuesday hinted at increasing its defence budget, the second largest after the US, saying peace and sovereignty can only be "safeguarded with strength".

China will unveil its defence expenditure, a part of the main budget to be presented to the parliament, the National People's Congress, by Premier Li Qiang on Wednesday.

Last year, China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 232B – over three times that of India – as it continues with the massive modernisation of its armed forces. China's defence budget figures are viewed with scepticism in the light of massive military modernisation including building aircraft carriers, rapid construction of advanced naval ships and modern stealth aircraft being carried out at a feverish pitch by the Chinese military.

Defending the expenditure, NPC spokesperson Lou Qinjian told media persons in Beijing that "peace needs to be safeguarded with strength".

TAIWAN TO FOLLOW

Close on the heels of China hinting at raising its defence budget, Taiwan's defence minister said the island is planning to boost military spending in the face of the "rapidly changing international situation and the escalating threats from adversaries".

Wellington Koo gave no figures but said President William Lai Chingte was working with the ministry regarding threats and urgent readiness needs, a reference to China's threats to invade the island, which it considers its own territory. *—PTI*

Arab leaders meet on Gaza plan

CAIRO, 4 MARCH

Arab leaders meeting in Egypt are set to approve a counterproposal to President Donald Trump's call for the Gaza Strip to be depopulated and transformed into a beach destination.

The summit on Tuesday hosted by Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi is expected to include the leaders of regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, whose support is seen as crucial for any post-war plan.

Egypt has developed an alternative plan in which Palestinians would be relocated to safe areas inside Gaza, equipped with mobile homes and shelters while its cities are rebuilt. Hamas would cede power to an interim administration of political independents until a reformed Palestinian Authority can assume control. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, an opponent of Hamas, attended the summit.

Israel has ruled out any role for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and along with the US has demanded Hamas' disarmament. The fragile ceasefire that took hold in January is meanwhile in limbo and the war could resume.

Trump said the United States would take ownership of the war-ravaged territory and redevelop it into a Middle Eastern "Riviera". *—PTI*

Arab leaders meet in Egypt to approve a counterproposal to Trump's Gaza redevelopment plan *PHOTO: X*

Rebels in Congo abducted 130 patients, says UN

DAKAR, 4 MARCH

Rwanda-backed M23 rebels abducted at least 130 sick and wounded men from two hospitals in a major city in eastern Congo, the United Nations said Monday.

Ravina Shamdasani, UN Human Rights Office spokesperson said, on 28 February M23 fighters raided the CBCA Ndosho Hospital and Heal Africa Hospital in Goma, a strategic city they seized earlier this year. "They snatched patients who they suspected of being Congolese army or the pro-government Wazalendo militia from hospital beds and are holding them incommunicado in undisclosed locations", Shamdasani said terming the developments 'deeply distressing'.

M23 rebels claiming to be fighting to protect Tutsi and Congolese of Rwandan origin have swept through eastern Congo since the beginning of the year, seizing key cities and killing some 3,000 people in the most significant escalation of conflict in over a decade.

Supported by 4000 troops they have taken control of key cities Goma and Bukavu rich in mineral resources and have vowed to march to Congo's capital Kinshasa which is 1600 Kms away. *—PTI*

Pope Francis suffers new breathing crises

ROME, 4 MARCH

Pope Francis suffered two new acute respiratory crises Monday and was put back on non-invasive mechanical ventilation, in another setback to his battle to fight pneumonia, the Vatican said.

Doctors extracted 'copious' amounts of mucus from his lungs during two bronchoscopies, in which a camera-tipped tube was sent down into his airways with a sucker at the tip to suction out fluid. The Vatican said the mucus was his body's reaction to the original pneumonia infection and not a new infection, given laboratory tests don't indicate any new bacteria.

Francis remained alert, oriented and cooperated with medical personnel. The prognosis remained guarded. Doctors didn't say if he remained in stable condition, though they referred to the crises in the past tense, suggesting they were over.

The crises were a new setback in what has become a more than two-week battle by the 88-year-old pope, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed, to overcome a complex respiratory infection.

The Vatican hasn't released any photos or videos of Francis since he entered the hospital on 14 February with a complex lung infection. They defended his decision to recover in peace out of the public eye. But on Monday one of Francis' closest friends, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, urged him to let his voice be heard, saying the world needs to hear it. *—PTI*

Kim's sister vows response to US carrier deployment

SEOUL, 4 MARCH

Kim Yo, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un threatened Tuesday to launch high-profile provocations in response to the arrival of a US aircraft carrier in South Korea and other US military activities, which she slammed as 'confrontation hysteria of the US and its stooges'.

She accused the US of showing 'its most hostile and confrontational will' referring to the deployments of USS Carl Vinson and other powerful US military assets along with US–South Korean drills this year.

Observers say her statement suggest North Korea may test-launch intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to strike the mainland US or other powerful missiles that would target US military bases in the region.

Kim Yo *PHOTO: ANI*

South Korea's Defence Ministry warned later it's ready to repel any provocations by North Korea based on a solid military alliance with the US. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump has said he would reach out to Kim Jong Un to revive diplomacy. However, North Korea has not responded as yet. Experts say Kim Jong Un is not likely to embrace this outreach as his focus is in helping Russia in the Ukraine war. *—PTI*

INFANTS NOT SPARED

More than 220 children raped in Sudan

CAIRO, 4 MARCH

A UNICEF report compiled by gender-based violence service providers exposes severe trauma and sexual violence faced by children in conflict-ravaged Sudan and show how rape is used as a tactic of war.

According to the UN agency report on Tuesday, some even as young as a year old have been raped since the beginning of 2024 and as many as 221 children, including boys, were raped by armed men.

The war in Sudan broke out in April 2023 between the military and its rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces with battles in Khartoum and since then, at least 20,000 people have been killed, though the number is likely far higher, driving more than 14 million people from their homes and pushed parts of the country into famine.

More than thirty percent of the child rape victims were boys, UNICEF said. The victims include 16 children under the age of 5 and four infants. The cases were reported in Gedaref, Kassala, Gezeira, Khartoum, River Nile, Northern State, South Kordofan, North Darfur and West Darfur.

Of the 221 children raped, 73 cases were conflict-related and 71 were not, while the others were unidentified, Tess Ingram, a spokesperson with UNICEF, said.

Social stigma and fear of retribution from armed groups and rejection from family is making it hard for survivors to come forward with their story.

The SIHA Network, a non-profit organisation that documents violence against women and girls, said many of them dealt with physical injuries and 'serious psychological scars', including a girl who experienced seizures linked to her trauma and others who told Ingram they attempted suicide. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Tariff war fears push Sensex below 73K

Nifty extends losses for the 10th straight session, falls by 36.65 points

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

Falling for the third straight day, benchmark BSE Sensex declined by 96 points to close below the 73,000 mark on Tuesday amid global equity rout on tariff war worries and persistent foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE barometer closed at 72,989.93, down by 96.01 points or 0.13 per cent, as 18 of its components declined and 12 settled with gains. During the day, it dropped 452.4 points or 0.62 per cent to a low of 72,633.54 but recovered some of the losses in the second half.

Extending the losses for the 10th straight session, the 50-share Nifty of NSE fell by 36.65 points or 0.17 per cent to close at 22,082.65. The index opened below the 22,000 level at 21,974.45 but managed to recover some losses later.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Nestle India, Asian Paints, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Infosys, Maruti Suzuki India, Titan, Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries were among the laggards.

On the other hand, State Bank of India, Zomato, Tata Consultancy Services, Adani Ports, Power Grid, Tata Steel and HDFC Bank were the gainers.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 1.37 per cent to USD 70.64 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,788.29 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

On Monday, the 30-share BSE benchmark declined by 112.16 points to close at 73,085.94. The NSE Nifty slipped 5.40 points extending losses to the ninth session to settle at 22,119.30. *—PTI*

Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Nestle, Asian Paints, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Infosys, Maruti Suzuki India, Titan, Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries were among the laggards ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Gold hits ₹89K-mark as US tariff worries boost demand

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Gold prices on Tuesday zoomed by Rs 1,100 to reclaim the Rs 89,000 mark in the national capital on increased buying by jewellers and stockists and strong global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The metal of 99.9 per cent purity rallied by Rs 1,100 to Rs 89,000 per 10 grams from the last close of Rs 87,900 per 10 grams. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity advanced by Rs 1,100 to Rs 88,600 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 87,500 per 10 grams. Silver prices climbed Rs 1,500 to Rs 98,000 per kg driven by industrial demand and the gold's rally. The white metal had finished at Rs 96,500 per kg on Monday. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Rupee settles 2P higher at 87.30 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

The rupee pared initial losses and settled on a flat note with a gain of just 2 paise at 87.30 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as a weak US Dollar index and a sharp fall in crude oil prices prevented the slide in the domestic unit. Foreign Institutional Investors continued to remain net sellers, which also weighed on the rupee. However, weakness of the American currency in the overseas market and lower crude oil prices supported the unit. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee witnessed high volatility. It opened at 87.38 then touched the intra-day high of 87.27 and the low of 84.40 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 87.30 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 2 paise from its previous closing level. *—PTI*

Jitendra Virwani is new head of realty firm EDL

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Realty firm Embassy Developments Ltd has appointed Jitendra Virwani as its Chairman and Aditya Virwani as the new Managing Director. In a regulatory filing on Tuesday, Embassy Developments informed that the Board of Directors has approved the appointment of Jitendra Virwani as Chairman of the Board and his son Aditya Virwani as Managing Director of the company. Sachin Shah will continue as Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, alongside Rajesh Kaimal appointed as Chief Financial Officer and Executive Director. Aditya Virwani said, "Embassy Developments represents our flagship development platform with 45 million square feet of residential and commercial saleable and leasable area, and over a 3,000-acre landbank." The Board also approved an enabling resolution for Rs 2,000 crore Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP). *—PTI*

JSW Energy adds 159MW wind power in Q4

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

JSW Energy on Tuesday announced the addition of 159 MW of wind power in the March quarter, taking its operational power generation capacity past the 8,400 MW mark. This added capacity is available ahead of the wind season and is ready to meet the increasing energy demand during the upcoming peak season, contributing significantly to a sustainable power supply, a company statement said. According to the statement, JSW Energy is pleased to announce that it has added 159 MW of greenfield wind power capacity in the quarter, resulting in total operational capacity of 8,400 MW. The company aims to achieve a total installed generation capacity of 20 GW significantly before FY2030. *—PTI*

World shares drop as US tariffs take effect

BANGKOK, 4 MARCH

European and Asian shares were mostly lower Tuesday after a new round of tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump took effect.

China hit back at US move to raise tariffs by 20 per cent across the board with higher duties of up to 15 per cent on US farm exports.

Germany's DAX slipped 1.8 per cent to 22,733.26 while in Paris the CAC 40 declined 1.1 per cent to 8,108.71. Britain's FTSE 100 lost 0.4 per cent to 8,837.92. The future for the S&P 500 rose 0.1% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was unchanged.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 dropped 1.2 per cent to 37,331.18, while the Hang Seng in Hong Kong lost 0.4 per cent to 22,922.16. The Shanghai Composite index edged 0.2 per cent higher to 3,324.21. The Dow dropped 1.5 per cent and the Nasdaq composite slumped 2.6 per cent.

The Chinese tariffs on US beef, corn, soy and other farm products announced Tuesday expanded the potential impact of Trump's trade tactics, said Francis Lun, CEO of Geo Securities in Hong Kong. *—PTI*

COFFEE DAY HITS UPPER CIRCUIT LIMIT ON 2ND DAY

New Delhi, 4 MARCH

Shares of Coffee Day Enterprises, parent company of Coffee Day chains, soared 20 per cent on the bourses for the second straight day on Tuesday after the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal set aside the insolvency proceedings against the company. Extending the gains for the second straight day, Coffee Day Enterprises Ltd stock surged 20 per cent each to Rs 30.78 and Rs 30.63 apiece, its upper circuit limit on the BSE and NSE, respectively. *—PTI*

Govt issues $2.81B gas bill to RIL, BP

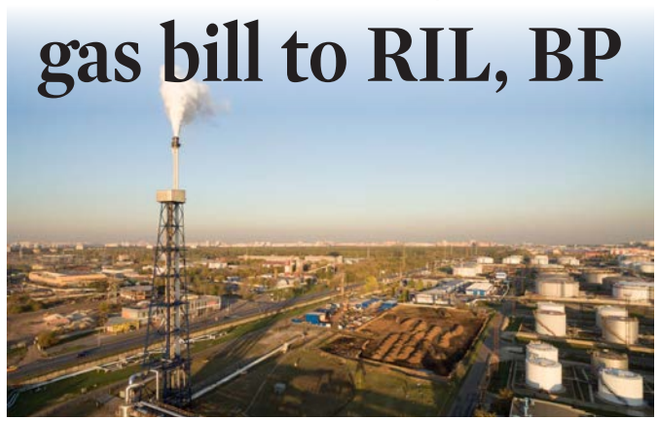


PHOTO: FREEPIK

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Indian government has issued a demand notice of USD 2.81 billion (approximately Rs 24,500 crore) to Reliance Industries Ltd and its partners, including BP Plc, for profits derived from natural gas that allegedly migrated from a neighbouring block operated by state-owned ONGC. This action follows a Delhi High Court ruling on 14 February that overturned an international arbitration tribunal's previous decision, which absolved the companies of compensation obligations.

Reliance disclosed the government's demand in a stock exchange filing, stating that the request was received on 3 March 2025. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has asserted that Reliance, BP Exploration (Alpha) Ltd, and Niko (NECO) Ltd are responsible for these gas revenues.

Originally, Reliance held a 60% stake in the KG-DWN-98/3 block, with BP owning 30% and Niko 10 per cent. However, Reliance and BP have since increased their stakes after acquiring Niko's interest.

The government had initially sought USD 1.55 billion in 2016 for the gas it claimed migrated to Reliance's block. After an arbitration tribunal ruled in favour of Reliance in July 2018, the government pursued further legal action, culminating in the recent decision by the Delhi High Court's division bench.

Reliance has indicated that it intends to challenge the latest ruling and does not anticipate any liability arising from this situation. The dispute dates back to concerns raised by ONGC in 2013 regarding potential resource drainage from their blocks. *—PTI*

Reforms must for investment growth: CEA

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran emphasised on the need for a modern and responsive regulatory framework to foster a conducive investment climate in India, as foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows may be affected by declining global growth. Speaking at the Post Budget Webinar 2025, titled 'Making India Investment Friendly', Nageswaran highlighted India's ascendance as a preferred investment destination.

Anantha Nageswaran ***PHOTO: ANI***

He called for improving regulatory clarity and easing business operations, stating that India must sustain a "mood of constructive optimism" amid global economic uncertainties. A strong investment climate is crucial for capital formation, job creation, and economic growth.

Regarding the recent increase in the FDI limit in the insurance sector from 74 per cent to 100 per cent, Nageswaran noted that it would attract more capital and innovation. *—ANI*

BOON FOR SC, ST, WOMEN

PM calls for enhanced credit accessibility for MSMEs

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised the necessity of developing innovative credit delivery methods to ensure timely and affordable funding for more than six million Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) across India. Speaking at a post-Budget webinar dedicated to MSMEs, he announced that five lakh first-time women, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) entrepreneurs will be eligible for loans up to Rs 2 crore.

Modi highlighted that while credit is crucial for MSMEs, they also require guidance, urging industries to establish mentorship programmes to support these enterprises. He pointed out the current global political uncertainty and remarked that the world is increasingly looking at India as a "growth centre."

In his address, Modi noted the success of the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, which has attracted investments exceeding Rs 1.5 lakh crore and generated a total production value of over Rs 13 lakh crore. He reiterated the government's efforts to simplify business operations, stating that over 40,000 compliances have been eliminated at both central and state levels, resulting in enhanced ease of doing business.

"Every country wishes to strengthen its economic ties with India. Our manufacturing sector must seize this opportunity," Modi said, calling for the exploration of new avenues in manufacturing and exports to boost the nation's economy. *—PTI*

₹1 lakh cr needed to stabilise liquidity

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Reserve Bank of India may be required to inject an additional Rs 1 lakh crore into the banking system by the end of March to maintain equilibrium in liquidity, according to a recent report from State Bank of India research.

The report noted a tight systemic liquidity situation, with a deficit of around Rs 1.6 lakh crore recorded at February end and a liquidity deficit of around Rs 1.95 lakh crore.

The current liquidity crisis is amongst the worst seen in over a decade, stemming from significant foreign portfolio investor outflows and impending maturing forward transactions.

In November 2023, the banking system enjoyed a liquidity surplus of Rs 1.35 lakh crore, but this quickly shifted to a deficit of Rs 65,000 crore in December, escalating to Rs 2.07 lakh crore in January 2024 and Rs 1.59 lakh crore in February. *—PTI*

USIBC emphasises on trade ties for growth

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

A prominent American business advocacy group has asserted that a substantial bilateral trade agreement between India and the US is long overdue. Ambassador (ret.) Atul Keshap, President of the US-India Business Council (USIBC), made these remarks as trade discussions between Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and US counterpart Howard Lutnick commenced.

Keshap emphasised the necessity of formalising a level playing field and providing full market access to enhance the trade relationship, which he believes is essential for economic growth in both nations. "Meaningful trade facilitation through a comprehensive bilateral trade deal is crucial, as it would significantly boost GDP for both the US and India," he stated.

- Keshap stressed on the necessity of formalising a level playing field and providing full market access to enhance the trade relationship

Highlighting the minimal 2.5 per cent representation of India in America's trade volumes, Keshap called for an ambitious approach to dismantle non-tariff barriers and expedite market access. He noted the potential for a landmark agreement to unleash entrepreneurship and GDP growth.

The negotiations follow PM Modi's recent visit to the White House, where he and US President Donald Trump set a bold target—dubbed "Mission 500"—to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030. *—PTI*

Saudi oil giant Aramco reports $106B profit

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil giant Aramco reported a $106.25 billion profit in 2024 on Tuesday, down 12 per cent from the prior year on lower energy prices.

A filing on Riyadh's Tadawul stock exchange showed the oil company, formally known as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co., had revenues of $436 billion in 2024. Aramco reported a $121 billion annual profit in 2023, down from its 2022 record due to lower energy prices as well.

Stock in Aramco traded around $7.33 a share Tuesday, down from a high over the last year of $8.71. It has fallen over the past year as oil prices have dropped. Benchmark Brent crude is at $73 — down 10% this year.

Aramco has a market value of $1.74 trillion, making it the world's sixth-most valuable company behind Apple, Microsoft, NVIDIA, Amazon and Alphabet, which owns Google.

Saudi Arabia's vast oil resources, located close to the surface of its desert expanse, make it one of the world's least expensive places to produce crude. *—PTI*

Startups raise $1.65B in Feb, valuation at $83.2M

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Indian startups raised approximately $1.65 billion (around Rs 14,418 crores) in funding during February 2025, reflecting a median valuation of $83.2 million, according to Tracxn data. This brings total funding for the fiscal year 2025 (April-February) to $25.4 billion, across 2,200 funding rounds.

February's funding marks a 19.5 per cent increase from the $1.38 billion raised in January 2025. However, year-on-year comparisons show a decline from $2.06 billion secured in February 2024.

Startups in Bengaluru topped the funding chart with $353 million, boasting a median round size of $2 million. Meanwhile, those in Mumbai raised $102 million, with a higher median round size of $5 million. The fintech firm Oxyzo led the February funding pack, raising Rs 100 crores in conventional debt, while B2B platform udaan closed a Series G equity funding round of $75 million led by M&G Plc.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Significant acquisitions included Head Digital Works buying Deltatech Gaming for Rs 491 crores, and Perfios acquiring the fraud detection platform Clari5. *—PTI*

FOR BETTER SECURITY

Jio, AMD, Cisco, Nokia launch AI platform

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Jio Platforms has announced collaboration with technology giants AMD, Cisco, and Nokia to develop an Open Telecom AI Platform, aimed at improving network security and efficiency whilst reducing technology costs. The ambitious project, detailed in a joint statement, features a multi-domain intelligence framework that integrates AI and automation at every level of network operations.

Jio's Group CEO, Mathew Oommen, stated, "In collaboration with AMD, Cisco, and Nokia, Jio is advancing the Open Telecom AI Platform to transform networks into self-optimising, customer-aware ecosystems." He emphasised that the initiative transcends mere automation, focusing on the creation of AI-driven, autonomous networks that adapt in real time to enhance user experiences and generate new service and revenue opportunities across the digital landscape.

The AI platform will be agnostic with respect to large language models and will employ an open application interface to optimise its functionalities and capabilities. Nokia President and CEO Pekka Lundmark said the company has trusted technology leadership across various sectors, including RAN, Core, fixed broadband and IP and optical transport. He said the Telecom AI Platform will help Jio to optimise and monetise network investments through improved performance, security, and customer experience, driven by the power of artificial intelligence.

As the first customer of this new platform, Jio aims to create a replicable reference architecture and deployable solution for the broader global service provider market. AMD's Chair and CEO, Lisa Su, confirmed the company's commitment to leveraging its range of high-performance CPUs, GPUs, and adaptive computing solutions for this innovative platform. Cisco's Chair and CEO, Chuck Robbins, highlighted the collaboration as a groundbreaking step towards revolutionising networks with AI. *—PTI*

PHOTOS: FREEPIK

INDIAN BOWLERS KEEP AUSSIES ON TIGHT LEASH

Australia got off to a shaky start as Cooper's opening failed

PHOTO: PTI

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

Indian bowlers on Tuesday kept the Aussies batting on a tight leash despite well-paced fifties from Smith and Carey.

Australia elected to bat first after winning the toss, they were off to a poor start as the experiment to have Cooper Connolly open did not pay off, with him going for a nine-ball duck after being caught behind by KL Rahul on a Mohammed Shami delivery. Australia was 4/1 in three overs.

Travis Head eased off some pressure, hitting Hardik Pandya for a four and a six and then smashing a hat-trick of boundaries against Shami. He continued his assault for a while until Varun Chakravarthy was introduced to the attack.

Australia reached the 50-run mark in 7.2 overs.

The spinner, who had taken a fifer in the previous match, once again emerged as a hero, getting the crucial wicket of Head for 39 in 33 balls, with four boundaries and two sixes. Shubman Gill completed a fine catch at long-off. Australia was 54/2 in 8.2 overs.

Throughout his stay, Smith was the pillar of Australian innings, and was involved in three 50 stands -- 52 with Travis Head for the second wicket, 56 for the third wicket with Marnus Labuschagne and 54 for the fifth wicket with Carey (61, 57b, 8x4, 1x6).

Australia would have been in a much better position had two of those alliances bloomed into something more substantial.

Few batters have a higher fortune quotient than Head and his cameo of 39 had several slices of fortune -- a dropped catch by Mohammed Shami (3/48) off his own bowling in the first legal delivery of the match, a near run-out, and a couple of inside edges that missed the stumps by a whisker. —*PTI*

NZ, SA look to shed underachievers tag in SF

LAHORE, 4 MARCH

Loaded with world-class talent but haunted by the underachievers' tag at ICC events, New Zealand and South Africa will square off in an evenly-matched second semifinal of the Champions Trophy here on Wednesday.

South Africa and New Zealand have won the Champions Trophy once each in 1998 and 2000 respectively but the tournament was called the ICC Knockout Trophy at that time and didn't carry the significance which it has now.

While South Africa would look to shed their big tournament "chokers" tag, the Kiwis will also be desperate to lay their hands on a title after having finished second best twice in the ODI World Cup (2015 and 2019) and once in the T20 World Cup (2021). —*PTI*

It's not size, but mental strength that matters: Gavaskar backs Rohit

Backing India captain Rohit Sharma, who was subjected to fat-shaming, cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar on Tuesday said that slim guys are for modelling and in cricket, mental strength is what matters, not physical size. Addressing the unnecessary criticisms directed at India skipper in the middle of Champions Trophy by a politician, Gavaskar reminded how Mumbai's big-hitting Sarfaraz Khan also faced body shaming, but it didn't affect his performance.

PRAGUE MASTERS

R Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh Chithambaram in action PHOTO: X

Praggnanandhaa faces Shankland after rest day

PRAGUE, 4 MARCH

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa, currently ranked No.8 in the world, will face American Sam Shankland in Round 6 of the Prague Masters following a rest day on Tuesday. Both Praggnanandhaa and fellow Indian Aravindh Chithambaram are tied at the top with 3.5 points each after five rounds, thanks to a hard-fought draw between the two compatriots.

Chithambaram scored his second victory in the tournament, surprising many, including himself, as he previously defeated top seed Wei Yi of China.

He expressed his astonishment at performing well among elite players. Next, he will compete against experienced veteran Quang Leim Le from Vietnam.

The duo leads a group of four players, all with 2.5 points. Wei Yi, who initially struggled with two losses, has rebounded with two consecutive wins, creating an unsettling aura among his competitors. Meanwhile, Anish Giri and Quang Leim Le have drawn all five of their matches so far.

Praggnanandhaa's performance has been impressive, securing victories over Vincent Keymer and Nguyen Thai Dai Van, despite not consistently gaining an advantage with the white pieces. His tactical acumen will be crucial against Shankland, who is equally determined to establish his standing.

Praggnanandhaa will play white against Chithambaram, Giri, and Wei Yi in the remaining rounds. In the Challengers section, Divya Deshmukh seeks to regain her confidence with 1.5 points. —*PTI*

Juventus dominates Verona in 2nd half victory

TURIN, 4 MARCH

Juventus produced a resilient performance to secure a 2-0 victory over lowly Verona at home on Monday, climbing into fourth place in Serie A. Despite a nervous first half during which they faced a near setback—Tomáš Suslov's stunning 30-metre effort was disallowed for offside—the home side found their rhythm in the second period. The breakthrough came in the 72nd minute when Khephren Thuram, left unmarked in a crowded penalty box, coolly finished from Andrea Cambiaso's cutback. Teun Koopmeiners sealed the win with a second goal just before the final whistle. With this victory, Juventus recorded their fifth consecutive Serie A win and moved two points clear of Lazio. Verona remains in 14th place, four points above the relegation zone, as they continue to fight for survival in the Italian top flight. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Serena joins Toronto Tempo ownership group

NEW YORK, 4 MARCH

Tennis legend Serena Williams has joined the ownership group of the WNBA's inaugural Canadian franchise, the Toronto Tempo, set to begin play in the 2026 season. Williams will partner with Larry Tanenbaum, Chairman of Kilmer Sports Ventures, in a bid to promote women's athletics. "I am thrilled to announce my ownership role in the first Canadian WNBA team," Williams stated, highlighting the importance of showcasing female athletes. Known for her 23 Grand Slam singles titles, Williams will also take an active role in future jersey designs. The Tempo's President, Teresa Resch, praised Williams as a champion and an inspiring figure for women in sport and business. Williams previously held stakes in Angel City FC and the Miami Dolphins —*PTI*

La Liga postpones Villarreal-Espanyol game due to rain

VILLARREAL, 4 MARCH

Spanish authorities postponed Monday night's league match between Villarreal and Espanyol due to heavy rain. The decision was taken just moments before kickoff at Villarreal's Estadio de la Ceramica with thousands of spectators already in the ground. La Liga said it will announce a a new match date soon. The cancellation came with Spain being deluged by inclement weather, four months after more than 200 people died in floods in nearby Valencia following record rainfall —*PTI*

Hockey legend Taekema to work with Indian team

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

India has roped in Dutch legend Taeke Taekema to work with the national women's hockey team drag-flickers on a short-term basis till the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Taekema had conducted a seven-day camp from 10 to 16 February ahead of India's FIH Pro League campaign in Bhubaneswar last month, where the hosts competed against England, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain. The seven-day camp was attended by the likes of Deepika, Manisha Chauhan, Sonam, and Annu, along with a few junior players. Indian women's team chief coach Harendra Singh said the camp has been very beneficial for the players and Taekema will continue to work with the side on a short-term basis till Los Angeles Games. Taekema, 45, was renowned for his penalty-corner precision during his days. —*PTI*

Usha: Ad-hoc panel for boxing needed as BFI failed duties

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) chief PT Usha on Tuesday defended her decision to appoint an ad-hoc committee for boxing, saying the national federation failed to fulfil its "fundamental responsibilities" in the last one year and her action was necessary to "restore order and ensure proper governance".

Her statement came in response to IOA vice president Gagan Narang's letter on 28 February in which the former Olympic bronze-winner accused her of issuing "arbitrary" orders and undermining athletes' welfare.

Usha's steadfast position is despite the Delhi High Court's stay on the IOA's order. The court issued notice, seeking IOA's response to a petition filed by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI).

Usha, who has been at loggerheads with the Executive Council members over several issues, accused them of showing "disproportionate preoccupation" with issues of "personal preferences" rather than the overall good of Indian sports.

The BFI termed the IOA's decision as "illegal" and filed a petition in Delhi High Court to quash the order.

Hitting back at Narang, the IOA president said she has made several attempts over the past year to convene Executive Council meetings to discuss key issues.

The IOA has been a divided house ever since Usha appointed Raghuram Iyer as the CEO in January 2024. —*PTI*

AAQIB NOW COACH

Pakistan T20 squad overhaul: Babar and Rizwan dropped

LAHORE, 4 MARCH

In a surprising move, the Pakistan Cricket Board has dropped Captain Muhammad Rizwan and star batsman Babar Azam from the T20 squad for the upcoming five-match series in New Zealand. Salman Ali Agha will take over as captain, with all-rounder Shadab Khan named vice-captain.

Despite their exclusion from the T20 side following a disappointing Champions Trophy campaign, Rizwan and Babar will retain their places in the ODI squad, with the selectors opting for minimal changes.

PHOTO: PTI

However, batters Saud Shakil and Kamran Ghulam have been omitted, and fast bowlers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf have also been sidelined.

Pakistan's tour begins on 16 March, but it will be without opening batsman Saim Ayub, who is recovering from an ankle injury, while Fakhar Zaman is ruled out due to a muscle sprain sustained in the Champions Trophy.

The PCB has confirmed that Aaqib Javed will continue as interim head coach for the series. Former captain Mohammad Yousuf will assume the role of batting coach, as the board prepares for two significant tournaments in the near future: the ACC Men's T20 Asia Cup and the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. The selections align with the PCB's long-term vision leading up to the 2027 ODI World Cup. —*PTI*

Odisha FC faces Jamshedpur FC in playoffs

JAMSHEDPUR, 4 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Odisha FC is set to clash with Jamshedpur FC in their Indian Super League match on Wednesday, keen on securing crucial points as the race for the final play-off place intensifies.

Having already qualified for the play-offs, Jamshedpur FC sits fourth in the table with 38 points from 22 matches, boasting 12 wins and two draws. In contrast, Odisha FC is preparing for their last league fixture, currently seventh with 30 points from 23 games. A victory over Jamshedpur FC would elevate them to 33 points.

If sixth-placed Mumbai City FC loses their remaining matches, they would also end up on 33 points, making goal difference crucial. Odisha FC's goal difference stands at six, significantly better than Mumbai City FC's levelled figure.

Despite failing to score in their last two matches, Odisha FC remains the fourth-highest scoring team this season, netting 41 goals.

On the defensive front, Odisha has conceded an average of 9.9 shots from inside the box per game, while Jamshedpur FC's goalkeeper Albino Gomes leads the league with 83 saves, highlighting the ongoing struggles and strengths. —*PTI*

Nottingham forest reaches FA Cup quarters after shootout win

NOTTINGHAM, 4 MARCH

Matz Sels emerged as the hero for Nottingham Forest, thwarting Ipswich Town's hopes by saving the decisive penalty in a breath-taking shootout that propelled his team into the quarter-finals of the FA Cup on Monday.

With the match tied 1-1 after 90 minutes and extra time, both teams displayed resilience, converting their first nine penalties in a nail-biting finale. Sels, however, made the crucial save by diving to his left to deny Jack Taylor's effort, securing a challenge against Brighton in the last-eight.

The contest at City Ground was closely fought, defying the league standings, with Forest sitting third and touted as a surprise package of the Premier League, outperforming Chelsea, Manchester City, and Manchester United. Ipswich, battling relegation in 18th place, initially took the lead eight minutes into the second half through George Hirst's header.

Nottingham Forest needed penalties to beat Ipswich and book a place in the FA Cup quarter-finals PHOTO: X

Forest equalised when Ryan Yates headed home from Anthony Elanga's cross. Yates had another goal disallowed shortly after, while Callum Hudson-Odoi rattled the crossbar with a long-range shot late in the game. —*PTI*

Al-Nassr draws Esteghlal in ACL without Ronaldo

TEHRAN, 4 MAR

Al-Nassr of Saudi Arabia faced a disappointing evening in Tehran as they drew 0-0 with Esteghlal of Iran in the first leg of the AFC Champions League Elite second round on Monday, with star player Cristiano Ronaldo absent from the match.

The 40-year-old forward, who boasts five UEFA Champions League titles with Manchester United and Real Madrid, missed out on the clash, leaving his team struggling for scoring opportunities. New signing Jhon Duran, who joined from Aston Villa in January, came the closest to breaking the deadlock, while former Liverpool forward Sadio Mane also had chances. —*PTI*

FROM 29 MARCH

India to host 2nd Asian Yogasana Championship

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

A total of 16 countries will participate in the second Asian Yogasana Championship, scheduled to be held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium here from 29 to 31 March.

The championship, being organised in collaboration with the Sports Ministry and Yogasana Bharat, aims to showcase Yogasana at the international level while embracing its rich heritage and deep-rooted cultural significance.

The event, being supported by the Olympic Council of Asia, World Yogasana, Asian Yogasana and Yogasana Indraprastha, will also help create a roadmap towards inclusion of the discipline in the Olympic curriculum.

"India, the birthplace of yoga, is honoured to host the 2nd Asian Yogasana Championship. This event is more than just a competition; it is a celebration of our ancient wisdom evolving into a modern competitive sport," Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said in a release.

Asian Yogasana president Sanjay Malpani emphasised the championship's impact, saying, "The Yogasana Championship is a defining moment in our mission to establish Yogasanas as a globally-recognised sport. We are witnessing the fusion of tradition with modern athletic excellence.

World Yogasana secretary-general Jaideep Arya added, "The championship in New Delhi marks a significant milestone in our mission to promote Yogasana as a global competitive sport. Yogasana Bharat president Udit Sheth said India is committed to shaping the future of the ancient sport. —*PTI*

Vani takes on Sneha in fifth leg of Hero WPGT

GURUGRAM, 4 MARCH

Vani Kapoor, who triumphed in the fourth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour last month, is set to chase another title as she competes in the fifth leg at Classic Golf & Country Club on Wednesday. The tournament features a competitive field of 38 players, including five amateurs, with a total prize purse of Rs 16 lakh.

Experienced golfer Vani will face challenges from established rivals such as Sneha Singh, who has already secured two victories this season and currently leads the Hero Order of Merit. Amandeep Drall, aiming to regain her form from her Ladies European Tour days,

PHOTO: PTI

Gaurika Bishnoi, and Ridhima Dilawari, who also performed well in the previous leg, are key competitors.

Sneha and Ridhima demonstrated their readiness for competition, finishing with impressive scores of 66 and 67 in the final round of the last leg.

Many professionals are utilising the Tour to refine their skills ahead of upcoming international commitments. —*PTI*